

## HEARTS, MINDS, AND BODIES: PACIFICATION

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### Introduction and Overview

Through fifteen years of growing American involvement in Indochina, U.S. officials in Washington and Saigon depicted the struggle as an example of a new kind of warfare called "brushfire war" or "insurgency." It was their thesis that a legally established and constituted government in South Vietnam was threatened with subversion and overthrow by armed insurgents controlled and supported by the Communist government of North Vietnam.

The reality bore little resemblance to this rationale: In fact, the war in Vietnam has been an extension of the eight-year revolutionary struggle led by the Viet Minh from 1946 to 1954 to rid Vietnam of French domination. After the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Geneva Accords called for a cease-fire and a subsequent regrouping of opposing military forces into two zones: the victorious Viet Minh to the north of the Seventeenth parallel, and to the south the defeated French and their Vietnamese followers. When two years had elapsed, a nation-wide referendum was to be held to reunify the temporarily partitioned country.

The Geneva Accords, however, were neither officially accepted nor respected by the United States. In the two years following the Geneva conference, the United States was instrumental in establishing the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in Saigon, and surreptitiously supported it with massive economic aid, military hardware, and advisers. More significantly, the United States permitted and encouraged Diem to cancel the referendum election scheduled for July, 1956. In 1955 and 1956, as well as in later years, the Hanoi government repeatedly requested the Diem regime to arrange preliminary consultations for the referendum, but Diem

consistently refused even to acknowledge these requests for consultations. With strong American support, the Diem regime effectively thwarted the goals of the long, bitter war for independence, blocked unification of Vietnam, and denied the Viet Minh the reward of their victory over the French.

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh did not overtly contest the undermining of the Geneva Accords by the Diem regime. Preoccupied with its own internal economic and social problems, the DRV at first contributed few men and little material help to the resurgent revolutionary movement in the South, which drew its growing strength not from Northern assistance but from Southern reaction to the nature and policies of the Diem regime. As the GVN became autocratic and oppressive during the Diem years, large numbers of Vietnamese (especially the peasantry, who constituted 90 per cent of the population at that time) began to support the National Liberation Front. Many regarded the NLF as the successor to the Viet Minh, to be the legitimate government, while they felt that the GVN, as successor to the French colonial regime, was an illegitimate claimant to state authority. The GVN was composed, for the most part, of the same leaders -- and supported by the same social classes -- that had backed the French drive to keep Vietnam within their colonial domain. Diem himself, while proclaiming nationalistic and anti-French views, had spent most of the war in the United States, while Ho Chi Minh had led the revolution to victory.

Under Diem, the GVN became a government of the privileged classes -- landowners, entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, and army officers -- who had prospered under French hegemony while the overwhelming majority of the people in the countryside had remained landless and exploited. Diem's "land reforms" only served to widen the breach between the rich and poor, for their effect was to permit the landowners, who had been expropriated and driven to the cities by the



Viet Minh, to return and reclaim their lands, and to sign new rental contracts with peasants who had been freely cultivating the rice paddies.

Religious differences also exacerbated the distrust between the GVN and its national constituency. Catholicism, introduced by the Portuguese, had been practiced by some Vietnamese for almost three centuries. The French, with the help of Spanish, Belgian, and Irish missionaries, had utilized the Church as a natural ally in their attempts to penetrate into the fabric of a traditionally Confucian society. By 1954, almost two million Vietnamese were Catholics, and many Catholic villages had supported the French against the Viet Minh. When the country was partitioned in 1954, about 700,000 Catholics fled to the South from the North, where they felt threatened by the Marxist-oriented Viet Minh. Diem purposefully aroused Catholic fear and discontent in order to gain a sympathetic, supportive population base for his regime. Once the vast resettlement had been completed, Diem turned to his new base of power and popularity in the Catholic communities, and recruited from them many high officials, bureaucrats, and military officers.

The resettlement of these northern Catholics must be considered one of Diem's early successes. But the tensions and conflicts which arose from this demographic change were major factors in the regime's increasing isolation and eventual demise. In many of the Highlands areas inhabited by the Montagnard tribes, newly settled Catholic communities were given land which had been claimed by the local Montagnards. Furthermore, American economic and agricultural assistance was heavily tilted in favor of Catholic communities. U.S. officials estimated that 50 per cent of their aid was going to 2 per cent of the population -- the Catholic settlers from the North.

Because Catholicism was the religion of the ruling Ngo family, it became wedded to the political ideology of the government through a rabid, uncompromising anti-Communism. The 1.2 million Catholics of South Vietnam -- about 10 per cent of the population -- achieved virtual domination of the political

process until the suppressed Buddhist majority overthrew Diem in 1963. As Jean Lacouture noted,

Being Catholic in Vietnam's tolerant and enlightened society is no problem. But to conduct there a Catholic policy based on combat, a Catholicism soft to the rich, hard to the poor, and rough on the gentle, a Catholicism reduced to an obstinate and anti-Communist recipe, is to trap oneself in an impossible situation.

As developed by Diem, the South Vietnamese army (ARVN) was as remote from the people as the urban, oligarchical, and heavily Catholic bureaucracy. Like much of the bureaucracy, most of the officer corps of ARVN (including such leaders as Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky) were products of French training. Many were Catholic northerners who had fought for the French against the Viet Minh. The few nationalists in ARVN who had fought with the Viet Minh, such as Nguyen Be, Nguyen Duc Thang, and Tran Ngoc Chau, never attained any genuine power or influence in the ARVN structure; rather, they tended to assume the role of devil's advocate, seeking to reform a corrupt, unmodifiable ARVN hierarchy from within.

<sup>This</sup> The GVN structure, ever more dependent on the financial and military resources of the United States, increasingly became identified as the pawn of a new colonialist power. To the proud and xenophobic rural Vietnamese, it was apparent that the source of their exploitation was a Saigon government answerable only to its officials and to those of the U.S. -- not to the Vietnamese people themselves. It was an all-too-familiar phase of the history they perceived as a continuing struggle to repel foreign invaders, such as the Chinese and the French, and to preserve the integrity of Vietnamese culture and traditions. In these circumstances, the GVN lacked the necessary aura of legitimacy. A government which was urban-based, Mandarin, and reactionary in economic and social values, dominated by Catholics, defended by a defeated, corrupt, and unpopular army, and manipulated by a foreign power, could not claim the allegiance of the Vietnamese people.



The NLF's claim to legitimacy was strengthened by the very fact that its structure and policies were the converse of the GVN's. NLF soldiers were farmers who spoke the same rural dialects, wore the same clothing, and held binding familial ties with the rural villagers. Because of these familial, economic, and cultural ties, NLF soldiers would usually be provided with food, supplies, and shelter. The NLF was by no means an ideal revolutionary movement. It resorted to terror when it deemed terror necessary, and conducted its share of "wipe-outs," the slaughter of peasants who would not accept its leadership. Hamlets were terrorized for food and supplies when these could not be obtained voluntarily. Most of the peasantry, however, recognized a fundamental distinction between the NLF and the GVN: The former was committed to building a new society in which the lot of the peasant would be better; the latter was determined to preserve the status quo.

From the beginning of American intervention, two basic strategies guided the U.S. approach to guerrilla warfare. One was the conventional military answer to a threat perceived in primarily military terms -- the course that General William Westmoreland summed up in a word: "Firepower." During his four years as Commander of U.S. military forces in Vietnam, the heavy, sustained use of firepower dominated Westmoreland's military tactics: search-and-destroy, air and artillery fire, and chemical defoliation.

But the Westmoreland doctrine had its opponents, found mostly in such civilian agencies as the Embassy, AID, and the CIA, but also including a number of military officers on the MACV staff in Saigon and in tactical units operating in the field. These men -- the "pacifiers" -- believed they possessed a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of the essentially political and human nature of the struggle. They regarded the conventional military approach to the war as ineffective and often counterproductive. They deplored the carnage and destruction wrought by heavy firepower, and the enormous number of innocent civilians

wounded or killed. They realized that such a blunt, unselective instrument could only drive into the arms of the NLF, the very people whom the U.S. claimed to be protecting in Vietnam, and made a continuing effort to minimize the negative effects of U.S. tactical military operations.

The pacifiers, however, did not question the basic premise of the American commitment: to defeat the revolutionary movement led by the NLF and preserve the successive reactionary governments in Saigon. The military and the pacifiers shared an overall objective: to extend the national sovereignty of the GVN. They differed on the means, not the ends. Where the military relied on destruction and coercion, the pacifiers attempted, by psychological and economic means, to "win the hearts and minds" of the rural population to the side of the GVN. The pacifiers saw insurgency as a competition between the two contending political forces for the allegiance of the people in the countryside.

Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale, American counterinsurgency expert and CIA operative, was the archetypal pacifier and proponent of the political approach. During his first mission to Vietnam, from 1954 to 1956, he held an influential position as adviser to the highest levels of the GVN, including Diem himself. His second mission, from 1965 to 1968, found him close to Premier Ky, as troubleshooter between GVN and U.S. officials. Another highly influential American, especially during the last years of the Diem regime, was a protege of Lansdale, Rufus Phillips. Both Lansdale and Phillips deplored the burgeoning buildup of American military and civilian personnel and resources. They maintained that only a low-keyed, sophisticated American presence could preserve and reinforce the GVN in its rivalry with the NLF. Their concept of counterinsurgency was based on a small force of highly trained, knowledgeable, and flexible American advisers who would work in close coordination with GVN officials in Saigon and in the field. Their credo was to turn the GVN into a popular



alternative to the NLF for the peasants in rural Vietnam, thereby pre-empting the possibility of a Communist takeover.

A fundamental assumption of the pacifiers was that the GVN could become enlightened, progressive, and democratic enough to offer a viable alternative to the NLF. Frank Scotton, a USIS employee who served in Vietnam from 1963 to 1969, spelled out the philosophical groundwork for pacification in a widely circulated memorandum of August 1966, "Revolutionary Development, Vietnam: Concepts and Philosophy." Revolution, he postulated, was a social movement deriving from the lowest stratum of society and led in Vietnam by a peasant-based group, the NLF. Reform was social change initiated from the upper strata of society, predicated on a leadership responsive and concerned about improving the condition of the masses of people below them. Scotton stated:

Revolution proceeds from the bottom to the top and destroys what will not yield. Reform as distinguished from revolution is invariably directed by representatives of the privileged classes, access to power being the critical privilege no matter how acquired. Reform must proceed from top to bottom destroying what will not yield. The reform of subordinate elements or less privileged elements is not possible until the primal elements and privileged classes have reformed themselves.

A paper written in 1965 by Peer De Silva, then the CIA station chief in Saigon, applied Scotton's theory to pacification in rural villages. "Our pacification objective," De Silva wrote, "is the simply-stated goal of causing the small family units which make up the rural population to become responsible to and receptive toward the lowest echelons of local authorities with whom they are frequently in contact." Most peasants knew little of and cared less for the central government in Saigon or even its outpost the province capital. Therefore, the GVN district authorities were the ones who would have to gain the people's trust and allegiance through their own concern and benevolence. It was a simple and appealing formula:

For a rural population, which has traditionally experienced callous indifference at best and more frequently thorough exploitation by its officialdom, to find this same echelon of local authorities itself taking the lead in civic action in its most basic and wanted forms -- it is this experience that prepares the ground for the growth of rural response and friendliness toward their local authorities. Given this, the next phase is characterized by the volunteering of intelligence against the VC to local authorities, other forms of cooperation will come as well. Once this watershed of morale and spirit is crossed, the VC fish begin to swim in a hostile sea. This, of course, is the beginning of rural security. This also marks the beginning of rural development.

The success of Scotton's conceptual framework and De Silva's practical application depended, of course, on the performance of the GVN at the district level. The peasants residing in each district would have to be convinced that the GVN's district representatives were more interested than the NLF in improving the farmer's lot. But how would the district representatives of the GVN reform themselves when no impetus for reform was visible at its higher levels? The GVN had always been permeated by a well-entrenched system of favoritism and patronage, resulting in graft and corruption on a vast scale. It was far more profitable for a district chief to obey the wishes of a province chief and to take his share of what was intended for the peasants; this corrupt relationship extended to the highest levels in the GVN hierarchy. This fundamental flaw haunted the pacifiers' programs from the beginning and led ultimately to failure. Scotton, Lansdale, Phillips, and De Silva may have possessed a more flexible understanding of the complexities of the war, but they could not or would not perceive the difference between the reformist leadership they espoused and the reactionary regime they supported.

The pacification efforts mounted between 1955 and 1965 -- Diem's Civic Action Cadres of 1955, the Agrovilles of 1959-1960, the Strategic Hamlet Program of 1962-63, and the Political Action Teams of 1965 --/the "counterinsurgency era." This was a time when Americans advised, influenced, and often conceived



and implemented various pacification programs as an answer to the NLF insurgency. In general, however, the GVN retained primary responsibility for administering these programs. For Americans and Vietnamese alike, there was room for flexibility, experimentation, and individual initiative; the military aspects of the war were still in the hands of the irregular Special Forces teams and the MACV advisory units.

By 1965, though, the pacification programs had conspicuously failed to stop the insurgency. With the GVN's authority hardly extending beyond the major cities and towns of each province, the NLF had become the dominant military-political force in rural Vietnam; the ARVN was being decimated by defeats and desertions, and the GVN as a whole was on the verge of collapse.

With the gradual yet inexorable failure of the pacifiers, the pacification programs began to acquire a meaning quite different from that reflected in their official rhetoric. They still promised the people a shining "new life" of rural peace, prosperity, and political development under the "enlightened" banner of the GVN, but, in reality, few of these benefits and reforms ever materialized; all that remained were the military aspects. Allegedly designed to provide the peasants with "security and protection" from the marauding NLF, this "security" was a euphemism for control and suppression of the rural population. Ever more openly, the ultimate aim of pacification came to be to uproot and destroy the social basis of a popular revolutionary movement, and to substitute in its place a government favorable to U.S. interests. To achieve this goal, it was not only the NLF which had to be destroyed; the real enemy, the rural people who supported the NLF, also had to be rendered submissive to the governing structure imposed on them from Saigon.

This second phase of pacification, dating from about March, 1965, when the first U.S. Marines landed at Phu Bai, to the fall of 1968, after the NLF's winter and spring offensives of that year, might be referred to as the "Westmoreland era." By 1965, when the NLF was believed to be a few steps from victory in the South, General Westmoreland and MACV recognized the dilemma confronting them: Either the U.S. would have to abandon South Vietnam to the NLF, or massive American power would have to be introduced. There was never any doubt about the choice. The era of counterinsurgency gave way to an influx of American armed forces with their strategy of massive firepower. With this reversal of priorities, the primary responsibility for pacification shifted from GVN to American hands; pacification became a program dominated and carried out by the American military. The military command in the Westmoreland era was highly critical of the methods and results of past programs. Viewing the war in a purely military framework, it saw the civilian attempts at pacification as poorly coordinated, badly administered, ineffective, and subordinate to the primary task of killing as many enemy soldiers as possible. One civilian described the military's attitude toward pacification as "Boy Scout stuff." Their view was summed up in the popular military saying, "If you grab them [the peasants] by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow."

The military's approach to pacification had its own logic. If the NLF guerrillas were fish swimming in a sea of peasantry, as Mao Tse-tung's theory of guerrilla warfare held, then by simply draining the sea, the fish could be deprived of their source of protection, and hence left vulnerable to attack and destruction. The commander of the Korean Tiger Division, Major General Chung Yuk Jin, put it succinctly: "The Viet Cong are the fish and the people are the water -- if we remove the people, the Viet Cong, like the fish, are left high and dry."



This formulation had a profound effect on the nature of the war. The enemy was no longer defined exclusively as the armed forces of the NLF and the army of North Vietnam. The entire social, economic, and political substructure on which the insurgents depended had become the enemy.

Deliberate displacement of vast portions of the rural population became the primary method of population control exercised by U.S. military forces. During the Westmoreland era, the "generation of refugees," as the practice was called, became an integral part of the search-and-destroy tactics used by most American ground units. When such an operation swept through a populated area -- even when no contact was made with an enemy unit -- the hamlets were often destroyed and the people removed by trucks, boats, helicopters, or on foot to a refugee camp in a more "secure" area. Air and artillery bombardment, harassment and interdiction fire, and freefire zones served to drive people from their homes and villages.

The American officers assigned to "psychological warfare" knew exactly what the policy was. They produced leaflets by the millions, and prepared tapes to be broadcast from circling aircraft just ahead of an attack:

Attention people. You must evacuate this area immediately as the GVN and Allied Forces are beginning an operation. If you stay you will be considered Viet Cong. Evacuate immediately!

Attention citizens. You must leave this area immediately. There will be artillery and airstrikes tomorrow morning. Evacuate to the east to avoid an accident. There will be artillery and airstrikes tomorrow morning. Evacuate to the east.

While scorched-earth and the generation of refugees became the dominant modes of "pacification" in practice, a new pacification program, Revolutionary Development, was launched with much fanfare and high expectations early in 1966. It was a remnant of the pacification programs of the counterinsurgency era, a continuation of the "Boy Scout stuff," and differed little from the earlier efforts, despite increased resources, organizational changes, and lofty rhetoric.

In areas where a show of military power had rendered the people submissive, they were allowed to function in a semblance of "democracy" and "freedom." Fifty-nine-man RD teams built fences and fortifications around hamlets, ferreted out members of the NLF's hamlet infrastructure, and organized hamlet administrations loyal to the GVN. RD activities which received far less emphasis were in the "new life" development area: building schools, providing health care, improving the local economy, and helping the peasants construct useful projects.

While much of rural Vietnam was being "sanitized" (a graphic term often used by the military), the RD program was attempting to extend the GVN's limited control over the rural population. RD cadre teams would enter their assigned hamlets only after a military unit had swept through and, theoretically, cleared the area of enemy units. Thus, the RD program was aimed primarily at those hamlets which had already been secured or which were still being contested. Since the NLF was in control of most of the countryside by 1965, except for district and province towns and various Catholic, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai areas, RD teams could generally operate only in or near the GVN-held areas. Hamlets situated close to the district and province towns and major cities were not subjected to total destruction and displacement of their inhabitants; instead, they were occupied by armed RD teams. In this context, calling the RD program the "other war" was deceptive; it was an integral part of the conventional military war being waged to destroy the NLF and win government control over the rural population.

Since the standard criterion for success for a ground unit was the number of enemy it could kill, the opportunity to engage and destroy an enemy unit generally took priority over whatever civilian pacification programs might be operating in an area. Even a so-called "pacified" hamlet -- one in which an RD team had completed its work, and which was, therefore, designated a "new life"



hamlet -- was likely to bear the full brunt of American firepower if any Viet Cong should happen to reappear.

• The GVN and the NLF

By the time Americans took control of pacification in 1965, most Vietnamese peasants had already experienced a full decade of "pacification" at the hands of GVN soldiers and officialdom. These efforts reflected the social, economic, and political weaknesses of the GVN, and revealed the essential differences in structure and policy between the GVN and the NLF, which were to play so significant a role in the former's failure and the latter's success. There were, to begin with, important organizational differences between the two sides contesting the control and allegiance of the rural peasantry. The National Liberation Front and the informal revolutionary movement that preceded it embraced precise political goals: the winning of the rural population to the revolutionary cause and the subsequent isolation and eventual demise of the Saigon government. The NLF cadre, guerrilla soldier, or administrative official had one central, all-important task beyond the obvious duties of his assigned position: to proselytize and politicize the rural peasants into supporting the revolutionary struggle.

By contrast, the GVN apparatus at all levels possessed only a set of administrative aims, without any political goals. Officials of the GVN were primarily interested in preserving the status quo, for basic reforms might threaten their own privileged positions. The GVN, therefore, saw no need to broaden its political and economic base among the groups and classes which it did not represent; instead, it simply perceived itself as an administrative mechanism for an existing, viable governmental structure.

This perspective was reinforced by the system of recruiting and assigning GVN officials. Once Diem had abrogated the local autonomy of the hamlets and villages by cancelling the local elections of 1956, the element of local decision-making disappeared. From that time, village chiefs were appointed by district



and province chiefs, who were appointees of the army corps commanders or of the presidential palace itself. To become a district or province chief, one had to be a civil servant or a military officer, and this requirement could be met only by those who had achieved the baccalaureate degree (tu tai), the equivalent of a high school diploma. In the elite educational system inherited from the French colonial era, this level of educational status could only be attained by the sons of the urban upper classes, of urban and rural landlords, and of the few wealthy peasants in each village. The vast majority of rural Vietnamese were thus permanently barred from authority and influence in the GVN structure.

Positions of power and status in the GVN were therefore limited to those Vietnamese who could least identify and empathize with the rural peasantry -- to those, in fact, whose own concerns often conflicted with the interests of their rural constituents. Furthermore, the general policy of the GVN was to appoint province and district chiefs to administer areas in which they were not residents but outsiders -- a policy designed to prevent any province or district official from gaining political power and prestige that might threaten Saigon's own hegemony. On the local level, many of the village and hamlet chiefs also were outside appointees, and those with local ties were often poorly motivated and generally ineffective. The restrictive educational requirements permitted little hope that a village or hamlet official might be promoted to a more influential position in the elite GVN hierarchy. Real power never reached below the level of the district chief; the local officials with whom the peasants most frequently came into contact were impotent.

Unlike the GVN administrative structure, the revolutionary movement of the NLF affirmed the primacy of local leaders and representatives at every echelon of administration. The NLF devised several methods by which their cadre and administrators could preserve their close contact with the populace. One was the self-criticism session, in which members of the NLF analyzed their own attitudes and behavior towards the peasantry. Another was the policy of "higher-

ups go down," which ensured that higher officials of the NLF would spend some time each month mingling and working with the people in the countryside. Since the GVN province and district officials considered their local village and hamlet appointees as mere errand boys, they made no attempt to involve the residents of the hamlets in the affairs of their own government. The NLF, on the other hand, mobilized support for its cause by involving many peasants in the various administrative functions of the revolutionary movement; each village chi bo, or party branch organization, had at least fifteen members, and crucial decisions directly affecting the livelihood of the village were made at this level. In matters of local importance such as taxation, legal disputes, military recruitment, and land distribution, the NLF village secretary and other local officials were more powerful and influential than the NLF province chief. The GVN administrative structure, besides precluding any effective role for local officials, even based its evaluations of province and district chiefs' performance on their performance of the very functions which alienated and antagonized the peasants -- such administrative duties as tax collection, conducting bidding on communally-owned lands, enforcement of land-rent payments, and fulfillment of draft quotas for the ARVN were not bound to endear the rural peasants to the GVN. In sum, the GVN, by its social nature and administrative structure, basically distrusted, deceived, and manipulated the peasantry; the NLF, by its differing social nature and administrative structure, won the sympathy and respect of the disaffected, exploited peasants.

A second major difference between the GVN and the rural revolutionary movement involved the policies and programs of agrarian reform. The distribution and ownership of land has been the fundamental, all-encompassing issue which for generations has caused turmoil and social struggle throughout Vietnam. During the war of independence against the French, the Viet Minh had expropriated large areas from French and Vietnamese owners and driven most landlords' holdings to the millions of tenant farmers who had lived for generations in a state of virtual peonage.



After Geneva, when the Diem regime consolidated its power in the south, American advisers prodded it to promulgate a number of agrarian reform ordinances in an attempt to win the political support of the peasants. At that time, one-quarter of one per cent of the South Vietnamese people owned 40 per cent of the rice-producing land, and the initial reforms did little to change this. Ordinances 2 and 7 of early 1955 were designed to reduce rent payments and increase the peasants' security of tenure on the land they were cultivating. Rents were officially limited to 15 per cent minimum and 25 per cent maximum of total crop production, and tenants were assured the right to farm the land for three to five years before signing a new contract. Ordinance 57 of October 1956 was the more significant part of the Diem land reform program, providing that large tracts of land would be bought by the GVN from French and Vietnamese landowners and then sold at the same rate to the tenant buyers over a six-year period. The primary stipulation of Ordinance 57 was that landowners would not be permitted to keep more than 100 hectares of land (247 acres).

According to Wolf Ladejinsky, Diem's principal American land reform adviser, these land reform measures had been successfully implemented by the late 1950s. The traditional exploitative relationship between landlords and tenants had been fundamentally altered to the benefit of the tenant-farmers, Ladejinsky maintained, and he credited the landlords with "mildness, not to say total lack, of opposition" toward the reforms. Only eighteen months after Ladejinsky submitted his glowing report, however, the program seemed suddenly to recede into the background of GVN activities. By mid-1961, the GVN had virtually ceased expropriating and distributing any further land, a development that some U.S. experts attributed to the instability of the countryside and the growing opposition to the Diem regime. Robert Shaplen maintains that by 1962 only about 10 per cent of more than 1.1 million tenant families (mostly in the Mekong Delta) had received any of the land meant for redistribution after the GVN had expropriated it under Ordinance 57. Roy L. Prosterman, an expert in land reform and professor at the University of Washington, estimated that more than seven out

of ten Delta families were still dependent on tenant farming and owned little land themselves by the early 1960s. And Bernard Fall estimated that 45 per cent of the land was still owned by only 2 per cent of the people.

Several factors contributed to the failure of the GVN's land reform program. Because of the 100-hectare limit on the amount of land an owner was permitted to retain under Ordinance 57, only 20 per cent of all the rice land in Vietnam became eligible for redistribution. Extensive areas not devoted to rice production were not made available at all for redistribution to the tenant-farmers. Americans advising the Diem regime had unsuccessfully opposed both of these important restrictions; they were forced to accept these initial compromises to ensure that the GVN and its wealthy supporters would mount a land reform program at all. Another inherent weakness in the GVN reforms was the requirement that tenant farmers purchase land by means of annual payments from the GVN. By contrast, the Viet Minh, and later the NLF, distributed their expropriated land without requiring any compensation. In these circumstances, the peasants did not oppose or protest the often heavy demands made upon them by the NLF for taxes, recruits, or food supplies.

With the return of general security and stability to the countryside in 1956, and with the issuance of Ordinance 57 and its 100-hectare retention limit, many landlords took the opportunity to reclaim the lands they had lost to the Viet Minh and to evict the occupants to whom the Viet Minh had distributed the land. When landlords chose not to evict the peasants, they often demanded back rent for the years that the landlords had been kept away by the Viet Minh. In some cases, as Felix Greene has reported, "rent was normally 50 per cent of the crop, so some landlords who had been away for eight years demanded 400 per cent." Peasants who could not make such payments were evicted.



In provinces where the NLF had great strength in the early 1960s, it was able to protect peasants from the forays of GVN landlords and tax collectors, and therefore rents and taxes remained low in these 'insecure' areas. On the other hand, rents and taxes remained as high as 40 to 50 per cent -- or higher -- in areas under greater GVN control. One American expert has described the true meaning of the GVN's alleged land reform in these terms:

The lesson has not been lost on the Vietnamese farmers. They began to regard the government as a surrogate rent collector in spite of ordinances prohibiting the collection of back rents and taxes for areas under harrassment by the Viet Cong. In Dinh Tuong, Bac Lieu, Gia Dinh and An Giang provinces, Saigon officials were observed performing the role of rent collector, following the troops as they advanced into contested areas. In some cases, they have kept as much as 30 per cent of the proceeds in exchange for this service. One veteran regional observer estimated that half of the Government's Popular Forces in the countryside, working out of fortified positions, added 'tax' and 'rent' collections to their duties. In at least one case it was reported that the army itself engaged in this operation, with the officers democratically sharing the collections with the enlisted men.

Many influential, highly-placed politicians in the GVN, including members of Diem's immediate family, took advantage of the government's land expropriation efforts under Ordinance 57 by acquiring and holding huge tracts of land intended for redistribution to the tenants. Landlwners also found it easy to circumvent the 100-hectare retention limit by subdividing their land into segments held by various family members.

After the promulgation of Ordinance 57, the Diem regime sought help from the tenant-farmer's union, headed by Tran Quoc Buu, to spread the news of the new land reform measures to the rural peasants and to urge their acceptance and cooperation. But Buu and his officials encountered resistance and hostility from landlords as well as from GVN officials at the province and district levels. Often the land reform advocates were arrested and imprisoned. The same allegiance of landlords and local GVN officials undermined the Farmers Associations,

which Buu had helped to establish to help the peasants gain credit and other kinds of assistance. One of Buu's officials told Shaplen:

The effect of these associations on our cadres in the country also became disastrous. Some of our people were kept in jail for two or three years, and, to save others from arrest, we had to withdraw because of the opposition to us. The failure of the government to give us the support we needed prevented us from convincing the farmers that the Viet Cong propaganda they were subjected to was false.

The United States Mission provided no financial or advisory assistance to the GVN's stalled land reform program, focusing its attention instead on assuring the survival of the Diem regime and its successors. Genuine land reform, U.S. officials feared, would antagonize the landowning elite who made up a significant portion of the GVN's support, and this would further jeopardize the regime's precarious stability. The agricultural policy of USAID during the 1960s revolved, therefore, around agricultural assistance such as new strains of rice, chemical fertilizers, mechanical equipment, and other technological measures. Such technical assistance was well-received and utilized by the rural peasants, but it did not confront the critical issue on which their political allegiance<sup>a</sup> hinged, the ownership of land. Even by 1967 and 1968, a survey in the Delta revealed that 60 per cent of the rural population were still landless tenants, still paying an average of 34 per cent rent.

In marked contrast to the 100-hectare retention limit imposed in law and unenforced in practice by the GVN, the NLF set a limit of five hectares on the amount of land any peasant could own. Five hectares was an amount of land which a farmer could cultivate, and it was also the level of ownership which many of the peasants had already managed to attain. The NLF's concept of land ownership thus coincided with the peasants' sense of social justice to a far greater extent than the GVN's approach. The NLF's tax policies also favored a much wider segment of the rural population than the GVN's policies. Taxes assessed by the NLF were progressive, with the poorest farmer paying the least amount of tax and the wealthier farmer or landlord paying more. The GVN tax



system, however, was regressively based on such use and consumption taxes as sales, market, and documents taxes, which inevitably had their heaviest impact on the poor.

To the NLF, land reform was primarily a political program designed to engender popular support for the revolutionary movement. The GVN's efforts at land reform, on the other hand, were less political and more administrative. Because it was overly centralized and administered from the Ministry of Land Reform in Saigon, the GVN program in practice proved to be mechanical, legalistic, and unresponsive to the differing needs and desires of hamlets and villages. While the process of local decision making was respected and reinforced by the NLF, the GVN applied its program of land reform from the district and province towns and from Saigon itself. By 1961 and 1962, the majority of landless peasants had no difficulty in distinguishing which side offered them genuine land reform.

The NLF's policy was not confined to shielding peasants from the forays of landlords, rent collectors, and GVN tax collectors. Another group which benefited from the NLF's protection policies were former members and supporters of the Viet Minh who had remained in the southern regroupment zone to await the reunification election of 1956. Beginning in 1955, these former Viet Minh were persecuted by agents of the GVN under Diem. As Philippe Devillers described the period:

The Diem Government. . .launched. . .what amounted to a series of manhunts. . .This repression was in theory aimed at the Communists. In fact it affected all those, and there were many, democrats, socialists, liberals. . .who were bold enough to express their disagreement with. . .the ruling oligarchy. . .

In 1958 the situation grew worse. Roundups of 'dissidents' became more frequent and more brutal. . .A certain sequence of events became almost classical: denunciation, encirclement of villages, searches and raids, arrest of suspects, plundering, interrogations, enlivened sometimes by torture (even of innocent people), deportation. . .

Diem's "Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign" sought to impose rigorous control over the political ambience of the population. Plans called for classifying the South Vietnamese by letter-grade according to their political reliability; another tactic frequently employed was the public confession of former Viet Minh fighters -- a ceremony similar to the Viet Minh's own self-criticism rituals. A Presidential Ordinance of January 11, 1956, provided for the arrest and detention in concentration camps of any persons considered threats to national security. This proclamation only formalized a policy that had been pursued since 1954; in those two years 15,000 to 20,000 "Communists" had been detained.

The GVN also experimented with a plan to reorganize rural life around the lien gia, or mutual-aid family group. Three to seven families formed a unit; each family was required to report any suspicious behavior on the part of any other families in its unit. A listing of the number and sex of the occupants was required to be posted in front of every house. In 1959, the infamous Law 10/59 went into effect, empowering military tribunals to pass sentences of death or hard labor for life for alleged "infringements of national security." Many thousands were executed or imprisoned under this law. Many others sought refuge with the NLF.

Still another goal of the NLF's protection policy was to prevent young peasants of military age from being impressed into ARVN, after a compulsory draft was established in 1957. The NLF sheltered "draft-dodgers" who objected to mandatory military service in ARVN. Only in rare cases were drafted ARVN soldiers or even officers permitted to serve in their native provinces. Even the Popular Forces and Regional Forces were required to serve away from their home province. The NLF based its system of recruitment and military service on the opposite concept; a guerrilla served first in his own hamlet, then became eligible for promotion to higher levels of military service in his province. Since the peasant's primary dedication is to his family, his hamlet, and



his village area, the NLF's policy of local service had obvious advantages.

Pacification, Vietnamese Style

Early in the Diem regime four-man Civic Action teams, staffed mainly by young, university-trained refugees from the North, were set up to live and work in their assigned villages, building village halls, schools, roads, and medical dispensaries. The program swiftly came under severe attack by the Saigon bureaucracy, even though the teams were increasingly used to provide propaganda and political support for Diem's Anti-Communist Campaign. By 1956, the program had been cut back and within a year it was all but dead.

In 1959, Diem launched a new program focusing on "Rural Community Development Centers" -- or "agrovilles," as they were more popularly known. It emphasized measures to provide physical security. By relocating peasants in specially designed villages situated on key national highways, the GVN hoped to improve its control over the population and weed out Viet Cong insurgents. Surrounded by spiked moats and barbed-wire fences, each agrovillage contained 300 to 500 families, many of whom had been forced to abandon their villages, ancestral burial plots, and planted fields. Peasants complained of clumsy and dishonest administration, severe material hardship, and the fact that their security actually declined as the NLF concentrated its attacks on the agrovilles. Such dissatisfaction forced the government to slow down the program in 1960. By 1961, after twenty-three of the planned eighty agrovilles had been started and 40,000 to 50,000 people had been resettled, the plan was simply abandoned in favor of the new Strategic Hamlet Program.

Concerned with the lack of progress in pacification, MAAG officials offered a new plan in September 1961, entitled "Geographically Phased National Level Operation Plan for Counterinsurgency." In the MAAG plan, operations in each region would be preceded by an ARVN sweep of the area. Diem, however, was more interested in the ideas of British counterinsurgency expert Robert K.G. Thompson, who saw the Viet Cong threat primarily in political terms. It was more important, he said, to make the populace see the GVN as a preferable alternative



to the NLF than it was to kill Viet Cong. Thus, the military emphasis should be on "clear and hold" rather than "search and destroy." Operationally, Thompson stressed the importance of the "strategic hamlet," a lightly-fortified village in a low-risk area, where economic development programs could be focused. For contested areas, relocation projects would create strong "defended hamlets."

Thompson's ideas quickly found favor among certain high-ranking American officials, including General Maxwell Taylor and the State Department's Roger Hilsman. By January 1962, Hilsman had presented to President Kennedy "A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam" based heavily on Thompson's theory. At the same time, Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, became the driving force in unifying GVN pacification efforts around the theme of strategic hamlets. In February, Diem created, by decree, a special Inter-ministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets. Although the plans did not coalesce until the official launching of the Strategic Hamlet Program in August 1962, certain key aspects were visible five months earlier in "Operation Sunrise."

This first pacification action in which the U.S. was directly involved began March 22 with an ARVN military sweep of the Ben Cat District in Binh Duong Province; little actual fighting occurred. Completing the second phase of the operation, the relocation of villagers into a newly built strategic hamlet, proved difficult. Only seventy families moved voluntarily; the remaining 135 families had to be forcibly removed from their homes. Although USOM had appropriated \$300,000 compensation money to be distributed among the relocated peasants, most of the money was withheld, pending evidence that the villagers would not try to "escape" from their new homes. The old homes, including many personal possessions, were burned by the troops. USIS distributed to all resettled villagers a pamphlet entitled "Towards the Good Life," which asked the people to adjust to their new situation. By midsummer, 2,900 people in Binh Duong had been relocated into three strategic hamlets, and similar operations began in Phu Yen, Binh Dinh, and Quang Nai Provinces.

Life in a typical strategic hamlet was severe. Each of the 100 families was assigned to a group of five called a lien-gia; each family was responsible for observing the others in its lien-gia and reporting anything suspicious to the authorities. Government-issued identity cards were required. Peasants could not leave the hamlet between 6 P.M. and 8 A.M.; anyone found outside in these hours could be considered an "enemy." GVN administrators of the hamlets were appointed, not elected, and were often corrupt and dictatorial. Inhabitants performed forced labor on hamlet defenses while their crops wasted in the fields. Compensation for vacated homes and forced labor rarely reached the people, and the resultant poverty caused widespread starvation. The NLF constantly harrassed the Strategic Hamlets, many of which were guarded by inadequately trained and often unarmed youths.

Although the Strategic Hamlet Program was heralded in the United States as a GVN-initiated pacification plan, U.S. aid was essential to its execution. American advisers were assigned at the province level to assist in training, provide defense-network radios, and requisition helicopters for population movements. AID agreed to fund 5,000 U.S.-packaged "Strategic Hamlet Kits" containing "building materials, barbed wire and stakes, light weapons, ammunition and communication equipment." In September 1962, USOM avoided red tape and rushed funds to the program through a direct dollar purchase of \$10 million worth of Vietnamese piasters.

In October, The Times of Vietnam proclaimed 1962 "The Year of Strategic Hamlets" and identified Nhu as the "architect and prime mover" of the plan. The newspaper also published a GVN report showing that 3,225 of the planned 11,316 strategic hamlets had already been completed, and contained 33.4 per cent of the nation's population. In April 1963, The Times of Vietnam reported completion of 5,917 strategic hamlets containing 59 per cent of the population.



U.S. observers, however, showed a greater concern about the quality of the program than about the number of completed hamlets. Hilsman had reported in July that "there is reliable evidence that the program suffers seriously from inadequate direction, coordination, and material assistance by the central government and from misunderstanding among officials at the provincial and local levels." In December, four months after a zone priority system had been developed and the program had officially been announced, Hilsman still concluded "the strategic hamlet program has not been effectively integrated with the basic military-political pacification effort to eliminate the Viet Cong gradually and systematically." CIA sources further noted wide variations in the quality of hamlet defenses, ranging from "virtual fortresses" to token fences providing little or no protection.

The strategic hamlet program continued as the breach between the U.S. and Diem widened through 1963. USOM's Office of Rural Affairs concluded that by August 1963, the Strategic Hamlet Program "had largely ceased to progress and within a month evidence of successful VC counter-attacks were available." Before a conclusive judgment could be made, Diem was toppled by the November 1 coup, and the Strategic Hamlet Program disintegrated.

Attempting a post-mortem observation, an unofficial AID working paper noted that some prominent Strategic Hamlet officials used forced labor and falsified data to meet their government-imposed pacification quotas. The paper pointed out that mere completion of a strategic hamlet meant little to winning government support among the populace. "Too often the tactics employed in the construction phase, especially coupled with neglect thereafter, produced an effort opposite to that intended -- even as they appeared to serve one of the basic aims of making people aware of the government's concern for their welfare." Diem's successor, General Khanh, confirmed the failure of the Strategic Hamlet Program in his policy speech of March 7, 1964. Noting the corruption and

overly-rapid construction of new hamlets, Khanh announced he would follow a pacification program placing more emphasis on quality and less on quantity. A Pentagon historian concluded, more charitably, that "one may say that the program was doomed by poor execution and by the inability of the Ngo family to reform, coupled with the inability of the U.S. to induce them to reform. The evidence does not warrant one to proceed further."

To fill the gap left by the collapse of the Strategic Hamlet Program, Ambassador Lodge proposed the Hop Tac program in July 1964, at a U.S. strategy session in Honolulu. Hop Tac was designed as an intensive pacification effort in sections of the eight provinces surrounding Saigon, using "whatever resources were required." Planned by the U.S., the program on paper featured joint U.S.-GVN control; in reality, joint control proved as difficult to realize as the "limited partnership" of the Strategic Hamlet Program. A Pentagon analyst noted that "Hop Tac is the Vietnamese word for 'cooperation,' which turned out to be just what Hop Tac lacked." From the beginning, Hop Tac had all the makings of a disaster. The program officially began with an ARVN sweep of an NLF-controlled pineapple grove west and southwest of Saigon on September 12, 1964:

The operation began on schedule, with elements of the 51st Regiment moving toward their objective west of Saigon. During the second day of the operation, the unit ran into a minefield and took numerous casualties. Shortly thereafter, instead of continuing the operation, the unit broke off contact and, to the amazement of its advisers, turned back towards the city of Saigon. When next located, it was in the middle of Saigon participating in the abortive coup d'etat of September 13, 1964.

Little improvement could be noted as Hop Tac continued. Most civilian agency advisors to the program actually opposed it. In October, a study group drawn from USOM, USIS, and MACV declared: "Generally speaking, Hop Tac, as a program, does not appear to exist as a unified and meaningful operation." Eleven months later, when Lodge returned as U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, he received an equally glum assessment of the program: "Hop Tac," concluded a U.S. embassy officer, "did not achieve its original goals primarily because



Pacification/29

they were completely unrealistic and did not take into account the difficulty of the task. These goals were set quite arbitrarily and with no regard for the available resources and the strength of the enemy." Recognizing Hop Tac's failure and its lack of support among U.S. personnel, General Westmoreland quietly dissolved the program in July, 1966.

Refugees: Converting Drain into Gain

The American forces assigned to I Corps and coastal II Corps in 1965-66 found that the NLF was the established and functioning government and social system for the clear majority of the rural people in these areas, with the exception of local political (VNQDD), religious (Catholic, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao), and ethnic (Montagnard, Cham) minority groups. The GVN held the province capitals, coastal cities, and most district towns, but its control extended hardly at all to the hamlets and villages in the countryside. For the arriving Americans, this was clearly hostile territory. The Marines at Phu Bai in Quang Nam Province had to fight their way out of their base camp and occupy the nearby villages to prevent the VC from mortaring their base and airstrip. Quang Ngai was NLF-controlled, as was Binh Dinh, and to a lesser extent, Phu Yen.

The major operations in Binh Dinh of 1966 -- Masher, Thayer II, etc. -- were invasions of NLF areas for the purpose of systematic destruction and depopulation. U.S. military officers thought they were re-establishing legitimate GVN authority; in fact, they were attempting to substitute a non-existent governmental structure for one that did exist, for the GVN had never exercised effective governing force in these rural areas. The first stage of pacification, therefore, was the military occupation and destruction (if necessary) of NLF-governed population and territory. The second stage was the attempt on the part of the invader to impose his own political structure and socio-economic system on the newly pacified and secured populace.

The prime victims of this process -- aside from those killed or wounded in military operations -- were the Vietnamese who became refugees. In the Vietnamese context, there was no such thing as a refugee, as the term is understood in the West. In Vietnamese society, the bonds of concern, loyalty, and social consciousness are strongest among individuals who constitute families, hamlets, and villages; there is no concept of national social welfare. A person who has been uprooted from his hamlet, or has left it voluntarily, is not



held in high esteem by most Vietnamese; his displacement and helplessness is regarded as a sign of weakness and bad character. Such institutions as government-operated or sponsored orphanages, or nursing homes for the elderly, or welfare systems for the poor, are foreign to Vietnamese social and cultural patterns. Their "welfare" structure is centered on the extended family, and beyond that on the collective unit known as the village.

As the war intensified, the GVN proved totally incapable of coping with the refugee problem. The GVN's refugee commissariat attempted various systems of classifying refugees -- war victims, temporary refugees, evacuees, in-camp refugees, out-of-camp refugees, resettled, displaced persons -- but found it impossible to register, account for, or even compile accurate statistics on the number of refugees. The increased tempo of the war caused widespread displacement of civilian population on a temporary as well as permanent basis. Individuals and families were frequently moved in and out of camps, or shifted from one hamlet to another. In most provinces, the number of "out-of-camp" refugees -- those who had been displaced and were left to fend for themselves in other hamlets or in the urban centers -- outnumbered the in-camp refugees. In the Delta there were few refugee camps or registered refugees, since people who left their homes (for whatever reason) could usually find shelter with relatives or friends in another hamlet a few kilometers away.

Most Vietnamese peasants found the idea of free-fire zones incomprehensible. The population of refugee camps would ebb and flow as people tried to return to their homes, rice fields, and ancestral tombs -- even at risk of death.

Klein maintains MACV had not initially planned to win control of the rural population away from the VC and to the GVN by means of large-scale refugee generation. Each tactical field commander had the freedom to run his operations as he saw fit. But members of the MACV staff observed that

for various reasons, people were streaming out of the mountains and the countryside and into the province and district towns held by the GVN. They noted that, with proper care and attention, the GVN could capitalize on this ready-made opportunity to win large numbers of helpless and displaced people to its side.

At the same time, aides to General Edward Lansdale, then working for Ambassador Lodge, had been studying the possibilities for resettling refugees into new towns near U.S. base camps, air strips, and port installations. This source of labor and employment was already in use at the Marine base at Chu Lai (1,000) and at Cam Ranh Bay (5,000). To American officials, such employment opportunities were seen as far more worthwhile than the lot of the average Vietnamese farmer, toiling over an acre or less of a rice paddy. And this kind of permanent resettlement would result in a net gain for the GVN. Increasing the refugee flow to GVN areas, would allow it to increase the portion of the South Vietnamese population it could "control." In a July, 1965, memo to Ambassador Taylor, General Westmoreland mentioned the potential advantage to the GVN of the large refugee influx from the increasingly dangerous countryside, as well as the challenge which it presented.

The adoption of a search-and-destroy strategy led to the "generation" of even more refugees. Sweeps through hamlets and villages were usually preceded by heavy shelling and aerial bombardment, and the inhabitants would come streaming out of the area. The military called this process of massive relocation "sanitizing the area, getting the people out of the way of the fighting. Once they had been removed, the area could be turned into a free-fire zone.

The generation of refugees soon became an end in itself. "If we were out looking for the Viet Cong mainforce, we wouldn't have gone here," explained an American infantry officer during one operation. "The object of this is not to kill Cong; it is to remove the population from the enemy's control." Once evacuated, villages would be systematically razed using bulldozers and air strikes.



There does not appear to have been a specific decision in Washington to generate refugees as a technique of population control. The strategy for the ground war had been turned over to the commanders in the field, and relocation appears to have been developed by them, as an offshoot of their chosen military techniques. However, Washington recognized its advantages and offered no objection to it. Indeed, in mid-1967 (just when the massive influx of displaced persons had produced in Vietnam a rethinking of the relocation strategy) Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach suggested that "we should stimulate a greater refugee flow through psychological inducements (sic) to further decrease the enemy's manpower base." There is little other evidence of Washington's involvement in the process, aside from a stream of directives seeking, to little avail, better care for the refugees.

In June, 1965, Welles Klein, then working with the International Rescue Committee and later the AID/Washington refugee officer, went to Vietnam to survey the growing refugee problem for AID. To that point, only one member of AID's Saigon staff had been assigned -- on a part-time basis -- to refugee affairs. Klein's survey, commissioned in response to press reports that U.S. air and artillery strikes were generating refugees and turning friends into enemies, resulted in creation of an Office of Refugee Coordination (ORC) in the U.S. Embassy.

Whether by coincidence or design, the ORC was established just at the time when the refugee problem began attracting serious notice in Washington -- particularly from a Senate subcommittee on refugees and escapees headed by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, which opened a series of hearings in September 1965. Testifying at these hearings, former Ambassador Maxwell Taylor blamed the massive recent increases in the number of refugees on VC and NVA military and terrorist activity. When Kennedy asked about procedures for warning the inhabitants of a village before a U.S. military operation or bombing strike was to take place, Assistant Defense Secretary John T. McNaughton produced a confidential directive from General Westmoreland, dated September 7, 1965.

Referring to allied military operations in populous areas, it said:

These same forces must constantly demonstrate -- our forces -- their concern for the safety of non-combatants; their compassion for the injured; their willingness to aid and assist the sick, the hungry, and dispossessed.

A more realistic perspective was provided to the Kennedy subcommittee by Stephen G. Cary, Associate Executive Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, who had recently toured Vietnam for three months:

...There are, however, two policies now being followed that have a bearing on the problem and that are appropriate to mention in the context of the attitudes among rural Vietnamese.

The first of these is the 'no sanctuary' policy of the Government of Viet Nam and the U.S. forces, and its companion 'open target areas' policy. I can understand the military basis for the first of these policies which permits a commander in the field to call up air attack support when his men are being fired upon or when he believes Viet Cong are taking refuge in a village, but more than military considerations are in order. I deeply believe the policy is wrong morally, short-sighted pragmatically, and disastrous in terms of the bitterness it is creating among civilian Vietnamese, both those whom it drives to become refugees and those who stay behind. I can see even less justification for the 'open target areas' policy, under which any aircraft, unable to dispose of their explosives on the designated target, and prohibited from landing with explosives aboard, is instructed to drop them within certain large Vietcong areas--on village, rice paddy, man or beast, wherever whim dictates....

Jerry Tinker, a staff member of the Kennedy subcommittee, spent parts of 1965 and 1966 studying the refugee situation in the populous and strategic Delta province of Dinh Tuong. In contrast to other regions of Vietnam, Tinker reported refugees in the Delta were relatively mobile and self-sufficient. There were few refugee camps, and the number of registered refugees receiving assistance from the GVN was small. No U.S. ground forces had reached the area yet, and the ARVN division was reluctant to undertake major search-and-destroy operations. Tinker could, therefore, conclude that "...pacification is planned



through slow political-military action, not wholesale military occupation." But he went on to note that certain VC-controlled areas in the province had been depopulated by regular shelling and bombing. He estimated that in mid-1966, 40,000 persons were living in semi-permanent resettlement areas, while close to 80,000 had been refugees at one time or another. Tinker also reported that the provincial government had used refugee movement and resettlement, through a scheme of resettling refugees along the principal roads, as a means of increasing road security and extending pacification. These refugee resettlements were supposed to create a kind of buffer zone along the road and to provide intelligence information about Viet Cong attempting to harass traffic and convoys.

In July, 1965, with the VC in control of most of the Cai Be District in the Delta, the GVN closed down an RF/PF outpost and helped the residents of a contiguous hamlet to move out of the area. What had motivated these people to abandon their native hamlet and become refugees? As Tinker described it,

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The removal of the last vestige of government presence indicated that when the VC insurgents did move to occupy the vacuum, the villagers, by inevitable proximity, could become targets for future government shellings and bombings. As long as they lived next to a government fort, they knew that although they may have not been fully protected from VC harassments, at least they were relatively immune from artillery fire and air bombardments. . . . As long as such a fort stands, villagers are at least assured that they are not in a no-man's land.

Elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade conducted an operation northwest of Saigon in December, 1965 and January, 1966. In a VC-controlled valley where hamlets were scattered along the hillsides and in the jungles, the 173rd relocated all the peasants into a single, central resettlement area at the base of the valley. As George Beauchamp, a USAID regional refugee officer, defined it, the purpose of the operation was not so much to make contact with VC units as to deny the enemy access to rice, recruits, and laborers. Once the people had been gathered into the camp, and the rest of the valley became a free-fire zone.

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With the introduction of systematic search-and-destroy operations in the fall of 1965 and the consequent large-scale generation of refugees, plans were developed to convert -- in AID's terminology -- "this national drain into a national gain." The GVN was to gather the rural people into the "safety" of the towns and cities and offer them attention and material care; in return, it was expected, the people would rally to the GVN cause. The VC would lose their constituency in the countryside and their source of support and supply. However, even as the refugee flow mounted from 600,000 in August to nearly a million by the end of 1965, the actual response in the field -- as distinct from the rhetoric in Washington and Saigon -- was niggardly and uninspired. AID's strategy was undermined by a number of factors: unreliable and inaccurate reports and statistics concerning the scope of the problem; a feeling that the refugees were only temporarily displaced by the exigencies of war and would soon be returning home, a fear that helping refugees with money and assistance might lead others to seek a permanent dole or welfare handout; a greater commitment to other programs and projects already under way; and, perhaps most significantly, a reluctance to assume the responsibilities of the GVN ministries of social welfare and rural construction in assisting the refugees.

The Kennedy subcommittee's report of May 9, 1968, concluded that AID had failed to impart the needed sense of urgency to a GVN regime which consistently showed no genuine concern for alleviating the plight of the refugees. By February 1966, AID's ORC had twelve persons working in Saigon and only seven in the field. In the subcommittee's words:

← Our government either was unwilling or unable to impress on Saigon the importance of the refugee program and indeed other programs aimed at improving the health and well-being of the people of South Vietnam; and without the full support and efforts of the Government of South Vietnam from the highest levels, progress in these crucial areas could not be achieved; at best all that could be hoped for was an ad-hoc, stop-gap effort limited to attempting to neutralize the political response of the refugees rather than gaining their support and allegiance. And so we saw, late in 1965, in 1966, and in 1967 the development of an ad hoc program aimed at preventing major human catastrophe....



The refugee problem was always considered secondary to the success of military operations. Military commanders planned and conducted their search-and-destroy operations without prior coordination or consultation with refugee officials, and the U.S. Mission in Saigon tried to downplay the refugee crisis. Each agency -- AID, JOSPAO, MACV, the Embassy -- had its own separate programs, and none wanted to be sidetracked by the refugee problem. "No one rated us on it," one former AID official commented.

The military seldom alerted ORC about impending military operations or requested support and assistance in handling the resultant refugees. Furthermore, the general lack of supplies and the logistical capability impeded ORC in pre-positioning supplies, even if they could anticipate the arrival of military-induced refugees. The usual procedure was unpredictable and makeshift; a cable would come into ORC after a military operation had begun, saying that refugees were leaving the area and requesting assistance in caring for and resettling them. An emergency airlift of personnel and supplies would be authorized to take care of the situation.

Against this background of U.S. and GVN inability and unwillingness seriously to confront and resolve the refugee problem, it is useful to recall the importance attributed to the generation of refugees during this period by various U.S. officials and experts. Dr. Wesley Fishel, director of the MSU advisory team in Vietnam which had helped the Diem regime formulate earlier pacification programs, testified before the Kennedy subcommittee on September 30, 1965:

← Thus far I believe the military regime in Saigon has failed to grasp the tremendous implications of this flood of humanity which now threatens to engulf it. If this refugee situation is badly handled, these people who are primarily victims of Communist terror could further intensify the political instability of South Viet Nam...

← If this situation is treated with some intelligence, and these 600,000 refugees are well handled, I would hazard the guess that by the end of the year there will be one million of others who are living in the interior and watching what is happening to their cousins and their friends in the coastal settlements who may decide that the government is, indeed, interested in their welfare and will decide to come out to join these others who have already made the break for freedom. If these people are handled well the Saigon government is going to secure the manifest loyalty which it needs.

In this view, refugees would help build a base of popular support for the GVN. Other experts had more ambitious plans. J.W. Higgins, a Rand Corporation researcher, asked "What would be needed in planning, supervision, money and other resources to run a refugee program that would attract potential refugees away from contested and VC-controlled villages and permit them to become assets to Vietnamese society and the national economy in the long run?" Many of the "assets," Higgins made clear, would choose to abandon rural life for an urbanized society:

One objective assumed for a refugee village program is that refugees will eventually be able to choose whether they want to return home, resettle in another rural area of Vietnam, or move into urban areas, having acquired the knowledge and skills that will permit them to be productive members of a developing and self-governing society.

An influential proponent of refugee generation was Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington, chairman of the Council on Vietnamese Studies of the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group (SEADAG), who wrote:

In an absent-minded way the United States in Vietnam may well have stumbled upon the answer to 'wars of national liberation... /that answer is/ forced-draft urbanization and modernization which rapidly brings the country in question out of the phase in which a rural revolutionary movement can hope to generate sufficient strength to come to power.' He went on to observe that the NLF remains "a powerful force which cannot be dislodged from its constituency so long as the constituency continues to exist.

A Ripon Research Paper of September 1967, entitled "The Other War" provided sober and calculating appraisal of this urbanization process:

Suppose for a moment that the rice supply of a Communist-held area were destroyed and the population made dependent on imported food distributed in refugee camps administered by the Saigon government. Such a refugee camp solution would give the central government a sure hold on areas that have been impervious to its influence. It might be seen as part of the "other war," the war for the hearts and minds of the people of South Vietnam. It wins the minds of Viet Cong sympathizers by disorienting them; it forces simple villagers off their lands, erodes their independence, and destroys the social order in which Viet Cong cadres thrive.



A refugee camp solution to the problem of insurgency is, perhaps inadvertently, well under way. As a result of the war, South Vietnam must now import rice for the first time in its history. 'Search and destroy' operations on the ground and bombing from the air have drastically reduced local rice supplies....

Between late 1964 and mid-1967, 1.8 million South Vietnamese peasants were made homeless by the war. The present rate is probably greater than one million a year. If refugee generation continues at its present rates...one third of the rural population of South Vietnam, some 4.5 million people, will be in refugee camps or resettlement locations within three years. Since no estimates put Viet Cong control, total or partial, at higher than 4.5 million people, the gathering of that many peasants into refugee camps could go far to eradicate from the countryside the settlements that supply the Viet Cong with their food and troops. Peasants would then be domiciled in manageable units; a central government in Saigon would distribute American aid to one-third of its population: and the dream of nation-building in South Vietnam would become a reality, even if the reality were, as one anti-Communist editor (now deprived of his right to publish) has put it, 'a nation of thieves and beggars.'

The attitude of American officials can be seen in an essay prepared by Eric Hughes, head of the ORC from mid-1966 to mid-1967. He admitted that most refugees wanted to return to their native villages to pursue their practice of ancestor worship but he added:

I think that when they get back out into village or hamlet life, a great number of these people will be disappointed and after sticking it out for two to six months, they will be heading back to the cities again. Many of those who have lived in what I call 'metropolitan' areas...like Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Saigon, are going to be somewhat discontented with the rural life because it is not going to be the same; it is going to be something a little bit different. Vietnam is changing; this is inevitable; the war is going to bring about a lot of changes -- I think we are faced, right now, with a great urban drift which will probably be reduced somewhat when peace is declared and then I think it will build up again.

Like refugees elsewhere in the world, the Vietnamese would want such modern amenities as central heating and hot water which their traditional rural existence did not offer. But there was another, less frequently stated, benefit of up-rooting peasants:



Undoubtedly, when these refugees come in from a VC area they are going to be VC sympathizers. One of the good things about the refugee program is the National Police have somewhat of a captive group which they can screen very well -- not that they take any punitive action towards the VC sympathizers. It does provide them with a means to identify these people and to keep them under surveillance.

By mid-1967, many U.S. officials in the various civilian agencies, as well as some military advisers in the provinces and districts, had begun openly to question the tactic of refugee generation and its effects. In the same period, however, the policy enjoyed the full support of General Westmoreland's command, and this enthusiasm was translated into action in the field. The Displaced Persons Teams of the 29th Civil Affairs Company, which had arrived in I Corps in June 1966 expressly to assist the refugees created by military operations, operated under guidelines which declared:

These people, even though considered a liability by the misinformed, are a true asset to the government of Vietnam. They have 'voted with their feet' to accept a more democratic way of life. They have deprived the VC of taxation, laborers, supplies, and food commodities. And finally the refugees, by being placed in a position to observe for themselves a better way of life, act as the best anti-VC propaganda that can be provided.

The guidelines defined "resettlement" as "a long-range program designed to permanently pacify the rural areas of the country and deny support to all Communist elements." They left no doubt that the generation of refugees was to be viewed as a weapon in counterinsurgency. Some Provincial Advisers who questioned the wisdom of the tactics of a brigade or divisional commander in generating refugees, were dismissed from their posts and moved elsewhere. This was the case especially in I and II Corps, where the civil-military advisers were always subordinated to and overshadowed by the Corps Commanders.

The same theme was sounded in a Refugee Division Action Program for July drafted through December 1967, by the Refugee Directorate in CORDS, which affirmed a familiar goal: "To transform the refugees from a liability to an asset to the war and pacification efforts." It concluded:



The action programs...would do much to assist the GVN in realizing its program goals. These goals are not isolated from the war effort and the pacification program, but are integral parts thereof and as such merit the highest priority. The potential of the refugee population in nation-building has yet to be realized.

The I Corps regional refugee office issued Guidelines for Refugee Resettlement dated January 1968, which saw in the relocation of refugees

...clear military, political, psychological, and security advantages which outweigh the corresponding disadvantages. The manner in which refugees are generated determines the extent of their positive or negative reaction to being evacuated from their previous area. The goal of Refugee Relief is the speedy re-establishment of all refugees in secure areas so they may become contributing members of a viable economy...

The refugees were not only a captive audience for the National Police screening and interrogation teams, but also for the Armed Propaganda Teams of the Vietnamese Information Service to propagandize the peasants and convert them to the GVN cause.

With the execution of good Psyops [psychological orientation] activities, refugees can better understand the advantages of raising their families in an economy free from fear and which provides an opportunity to earn a good living. It will also enhance popular support for the GVN.

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A MACV district adviser who served in Binh Duong Province of III Corps in 1966 and 1967 has provided a graphic description of a relocation operation in the district of Ben Cat, where about 500 families were uprooted from their villages without prior plans or preparations -- and without any warning. The relocation, designed to provide population control and to create a free-fire zone, was completed in ten days. The U.S. First Infantry Division provided trucks and troops to guard the roadside, and GIs helped the villagers to dismantle parts of their homes and load their belongings. The district adviser noted that the peasants were in great confusion during the operation, and that many were reluctant to move. Some had to be removed by force, and then bulldozers arrived to level the villages for a free-fire zone.

The Ben Cat temporary relocation area was the scene of an operation called "county Fair," where the incredulous refugees were offered food and Coca Cola, movies were shown, and a military band played continuous jazz (one of the favorites was "When the Saints Come Marching In"). AID and CARE representatives were present, physicians and dentists circulated among the peasants, GVN propaganda teams put in their plug for the allied cause, and at the same time, Vietnamese National Police and military intelligence men screened every peasant, checking ID cards and arresting VC suspects. Finally, both the district chief and the province chief addressed the peasants, explaining the reasons for their relocation and promising them money, aid, and eventual permanent resettlement. "I think they came away feeling a little bit better," the U.S. district adviser said. Six months later, the refugees had received none of the benefits promised by the GVN, except their new quarters near Ben Cat now had tin roofing.

In Quang Tin Province, in the summer of 1967, the AID province representative reported that the official records showed 45,000 refugees on the rolls, though there were at least 15,000 to 20,000 more. Many had been in camps for three, four, or five years and were supposed to have been resettled long ago, but the camps had become permanent and the people chose to stay rather than move



again. According to GVN regulations, refugees were to move out of the camps and into existing communities after two years, but this rarely happened. Refugee benefit payments were disbursed irregularly, and much of the money went into the pockets of the province chief and his refugee service chief. JOSPAO (U.S.) and VIS (GVN) information teams rarely informed the refugees of their rights. The AID province representative concluded his report on the refugee situation in Quang Tin with these words:

...I feel that the generation of refugees paid off in the sense that the relocations and the restructuring of refugee life into communities has strengthened the government's position -- this is contrary to the thought of the province chief. His attitude has always been that they've been living in VC territory for so many years and they haven't come out on their own accord -- it was their choice -- 'Go ahead and make it a free-fire zone and kill them all.' That was the Vietnamese way of thinking, by the way, not the American, even though many of the American Army units had that same concept.

In May 1967, Quang Tri was subjected to a major relocation operation, designed to evacuate all civilians living along the southern border of the Demilitarized Zone, so that work could begin on the McNamara Barrier against North Vietnamese infiltration. The peasants were to be resettled ten kilometers to the south at Cam Lo, while their homes would be destroyed to make way for the barrier. By May 14, elaborate plans for every aspect of the relocation had been laid out, and some stages -- warning and preparation of the peasants, construction of the resettlement site, and stockpiling of relief supplies -- had begun. It was to be a gradual and well-coordinated relocation, moving 120 families a day over a one-month period. But on May 18, two days after the movements had commenced, ARVN and U.S. Marines launched three operations in the area, and the evacuation had to be accelerated and completed in only ten days. This unexpected change in timing upset the careful plans; 2000 families were forced to leave most of their possessions behind and their relocation site at Cam Lo was unprepared to receive and assist them. Medical care, registration and screening, water facilities, a school,

entertainment, and housing were all strained and often inadequate for the sudden influx of refugees. The ARVN Engineering unit which had prepared the site for the refugees had bulldozed away everything on the land, including the topsoil, turning the area into a dry, barren, and dust-swept tract.

In Thua Thien Province, two ARVN units evacuated 13,000 civilians from an area north of Hue in June 1967, and then designated the evacuated area a free-fire zone. The operation, known as Lam Son 87, was kept secret until two days before it began, so the district chiefs and GVN refugee officials had no time to prepare for the arrival of the refugees at two district towns. The refugees received little assistance from the GVN, and had to find shelter for themselves in vacant schools, pagodas, or with local relatives or residents of the area.

As of mid-1967, the number of refugees in Quang Nam Province was estimated at 154,000 -- 74,000 in official government camps, and another 80,000 unregistered refugees living outside the camps. The once tranquil city of Da Nang began to receive a refugee flow during the floods of late 1964; by the middle of 1967 Da Nang's population had doubled from 120,000 to 240,000. Yet, at the beginning of 1967, officials reported that there were only about 10,000 officially registered refugees residing in the city's four temporary refugee camps, and an additional 11,000 unregistered displaced persons living within the city limits. Most of the rest were squatting on public land and receiving no recognition or assistance from the GVN.

The mayor of Da Nang first attempted to alleviate the situation by building some permanent housing for the 10,000 registered refugees in the temporary camps. As soon as they moved into the new housing units, however, the temporary camps filled up again with new refugees. The mayor then lost his will to help the refugees, and decided that no more would be registered, assisted, or resettled in Da Nang. He even ordered all unregistered refugees out of the city -- the order was not enforced -- and then closed down the Da Nang office of the GVN's Special Commissariat for Refugees early in 1967.



During the first half of 1967, the refugee relief program seemed to decline in priority and importance as many American refugee officials, both in Saigon and in AID/Washington, emphasized other pacification efforts. The monthly statistical reports sent back to the Washington office said nothing about refugees and their condition. In Vietnam, the refugee program continued to be sorely understaffed. As late as August 1967, there were only thirty-two U.S. refugee officers -- twelve in the CORDS Saigon office, six at the regional levels, and only fourteen in the provinces -- to assist the GVN in handling three to four million refugees. (By November, AID in Washington dispatched another forty advisers, making a total of seventy-two refugee officers. The Saigon office had a disproportionate share of the personnel -- twenty-eight in the central office, with forty-four in the field.)

A second weakness emerged in June and July, especially in I and II Corps where the refugee problem was most acute. The Deputy for CORDS in I Corps had reassigned about half of the refugee officers in I Corps to other duties which he thought were more important. Robert Komer, the chief of CORDS, had to issue a directive prohibiting the assignment of refugee officers to anything but refugee matters.

A General Accounting Office report to the Kennedy subcommittee in October 1967 spoke of a growing refugee crisis, especially in I Corps, where GVN authorities counted only 25,028 new refugees between April 1 and July 31, while CORDS/Refugees had reported 150,000. The GAO report also noted that during 1966 the GVN had spent only 44 per cent of the one billion piasters budgeted for refugee relief. Of the amount budgeted for 1967 -- 1.5 billion piasters, only 23 per cent had been released and spent by the end of October.

The GAO report included these comments on Washington's lack of concern for the refugee situation:

Interviews with Washington officials indicated that they were not aware of the magnitude of the problem building up in this area until it appeared in the press in late July 1967.

In June 1967, cognizant AID/Washington personnel were reporting to top management that there were no unusual refugee problems in Vietnam. After stories started appearing in the news media and after the Kennedy subcommittee started making inquiries into the status of the refugee program, one of AID/Washington's top officials went to Saigon for about a ten-day period in order to get first-hand information on conditions and to make recommendations.

Early in August 1967, Welles Klein, the refugee backstop officer in AID/Washington, received a cable from Richard Holdren, the regional refugee officer for I Corps, which was highly critical of the progress of the refugee program in the five provinces of I Corps. The report was summarized in The Washington Post:

There is a highly visible failure of the announced Government of Vietnam refugee assistance program. Less than 50 per cent of the refugees have received temporary relief payments; less than 25 per cent have gotten resettlement assistance. Some have received one payment or the other. Others have received no assistance at all. The program is too little to be really meaningful and sorely delayed. As a result, there is widespread disillusionment among the refugees. The psychological warfare loss to the allied cause is incalculable, not only among refugees, but on the other side credence is given to the Viet Cong claim that the Government of Vietnam is not interested in the rural people.

Klein, AID Administrator James Grant, and Senator Kennedy held a hasty meeting to discuss the Holdren memo, and Klein was immediately sent to Vietnam to investigate. His first task was to come to the support of Holdren, who had been severely criticized and termed a "troublemaker" by his immediate superior and the III MAF Commanding General, Robert Cushman for whom the report was prepared.

In a report to Komer and Grant in Washington on September 18, 1967, Klein noted that there was no planning or even consultation between AID refugee officers and the military commanders in the field on how to cope with the refugees generated by military operations. U.S. refugee advisers were kept in the dark as to where, when, and in what numbers refugees would be coming into the camps and cities from the war-racked countryside. This lack of coordination between the refugee-makers and the refugee-helpers, plus the unreliable reporting and performance of GVN



authorities made effective planning impossible. "We were caught flat-footed," Klein said.

In this context, his recommendations were predictable: He called for a greater sense of urgency and priority for the refugee program; an increase in personnel, both in Saigon and in the field; an immediate solution to the logistics problem; greater pressure on the GVN to carry out its responsibilities; an improved and more accurate reporting system from the field to Saigon and Saigon back to Washington, and a greater effort on the part of the military to coordinate operations with the refugee advisers and to assume some responsibility for the refugees they created.

On September 23, Komer helped draft a directive which Westmoreland sent to his corps commanders to make them aware of the growing refugee problem and of their responsibilities in coping with it. It did not question or criticize the concept of refugee generation, and was essentially a public relations exercise designed to stifle growing criticism in Congress and the press. There was no change in the condition of the refugees or the assistance they received from the U.S. and GVN.

Despite the rhetoric of a new priority and increased efforts for the refugee program by such officials as Klein and Komer, refugee conditions continued to deteriorate. In a report sent directly to the Kennedy subcommittee, Dennis Smith, an AID refugee action officer in II and III Corps during 1967 and 1968, described crowded camps packed with despondent refugees. Smith found one camp housing more than 14,000 people on a land area of 3.5 acres. Vocational and elementary education programs were reaching only a small percentage of the refugee population, and public health programs were almost non-existent; among the 1.25 million refugees who had been registered by that time, more than half were suffering from pneumonia, tuberculosis, malnutrition, and worms. Smith spoke of the isolation of many camps which refugee officers had not visited for months. He also dealt with the complicated and cumbersome chain of command under the new CORDS system, which inhibited rapid and efficient action, and with the corruption, neglect, and

even hostility shown the refugees by the GVN.

In testimony before the Kennedy subcommittee, Dean James Dumpson of the Fordham School of Social Service reported that many GVN "resettlement hamlets" were nothing more than temporary camps whose status had been changed to permanent resettlement camps by the stroke of a pen. "In almost all cases," he noted, "the camps were not altered -- crowded living conditions were not improved and resettlement payments were not made to many of the refugees." Dumpson and an AID Task Force estimated that just before the 1968 Tet offensive, the number of displaced persons who were not and had never been officially registered as refugees ranged between 2 and 2.5 million. As a case in point, no refugees were listed in Saigon in late 1967, though half a million or more people had fled the countryside for Saigon and were visible in the city's slums and shantytowns.

A General Accounting Office survey in December 1967 of conditions in eighteen official refugee camps holding about 28,000 persons gave this account:

Only 826 of the minimum requirement of 1,847 housing units were actually in existence -- under 45 per cent. Only fourteen schools were in existence despite a minimum scheduled requirement of sixty -- few of the refugee children were being given a chance for education. Of a needed fifty medical dispensaries, considered necessary for refugees' health needs in these eighteen camps, there were actually only three available.

The Kennedy subcommittee noted that U.S. materials and supplies sent to Saigon for refugee relief were handed over to the GVN or to the individual province chiefs, who controlled their eventual disposition. The lack of leverage on the American side reinforced the opportunities for graft and diversion of large quantities of these materials. The subcommittee estimated, too, that 75 per cent of the resettlement payments due to refugees who had lived in temporary camps for three months or more were siphoned off before they ever reached the intended recipients. In Pleiku Province, 13,000 refugees were reported by the GVN as resettled, but 10,000 of them claimed they had not received a single piaster of their resettlement payments.



Dennis Smith of the Kennedy subcommittee staff reported that where GVN equipment and personnel were used to transport commodities, "we have to write off at least 30 per cent of our goods to pilferage." As a case in point, he noted that CORDS/Refugees issued 125 jeeps to the GVN refugee program, and two months later only 75 were still accounted for. Smith said he had personally ordered a shipload of rice to be sent to Qui Nhon to alleviate an acute rice shortage in refugee camps in II Corps provinces; when the ship arrived and was ready to be unloaded, "we discovered that the GVN warehouses were full of rice. We had to send our shipload of rice back to Saigon. After further investigation, we discovered that the GVN were withholding rice from the refugees and selling it to the local markets."

In a report issued in May, 1968, the Kennedy subcommittee concluded:

The corruption in Vietnam is wholly unlike misconduct in most other countries. It pervades every level of government; but most important, it has a direct bearing and effect on the current efforts of the South Vietnamese Government to win its battle against the Viet Cong. Profits from corruption cut down the effectiveness of programs aimed at helping the people of South Vietnam and directly hinder efforts to gain popular support. And a small cadre of elite may exist who, because of the profits from corruption, lose their incentive for bringing this bloody war to a close.

On the American side of the refugee program, officials were poorly informed on the terrible reality facing the refugees. Above the district level, there was little first-hand experience with the refugee program, and it was viewed from there with increasing levels of fantasy. The U.S. program was also plagued with many weak and ineffectual officials. But even the more aggressive officials were powerless, subordinated as they were to the military chain of command, which was concerned with its conventional war, not with the victims of its tactics.

Pacification, American Style

The experience of the U.S. 25th Division in Hau Nghia Province in III Corps from 1966 to 1969 provides a revealing illustration of American attitudes toward the task of 'pacification.'

The 25th Division arrived in Cu Chi District of Hau Nghia Province in January--1966. The area had been out of GVN control and governed by the NLF for years; on its arrival, the 25th encountered not only a hard-core VC regiment but also a hostile and unsympathetic populace. The months of January and February were spent trying to establish a base camp and a secure perimeter, and many battle casualties were suffered as a result of VC harassment and infiltration. As the months passed, the division expanded out of its enclave, but only at heavy cost in casualties to itself and a far heavier toll of VC and civilian casualties. Civilians were often caught in the cross-fire as U.S. units brought their firepower to bear on suspected VC targets. The division had been trained to fight a conventional war, and its commander, General Fred Weyand, initially defined its mission in what was by then the accepted way - "killing the enemy." As he came to understand the political nature of the war, however, Weyand recognized that heavy civilian casualties and destruction of villages were bound to prove counterproductive. By the spring of 1966, he was ready to try another approach.

In May the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 25th were assigned a role in maintaining the security in the area around the province capital of Bao Tri and the road connecting it with the Cu Chi base camp. These units were directed to remain for an extended period of time in this area, work closely with the province chief and his intelligence network in seeking out enemy units and supplies, and develop close relations with the local villagers through civic action programs. The object was to deprive the VC guerrillas of their base of support through a sophisticated and selective use of military and socio-economic tactics, rather than through indiscriminate violence and massive firepower. This latter tactic had been Standard Operating Procedure for the 25th; the new approach was a significant departure.

The two battalions pursued their new tactics until the end of 1966. They helped



to train local RF and PF troops; swept the main road clear of mines; laid ambushes at night for the VC; mounted small, targetted operations on the basis of hard intelligence data, and provided medical care and other civic action services. The effort was deemed successful at first, but by the fall, the initial enthusiasm had worn off. In December, one battalion was pulled out of its pacification role and sent to aid the 198th Infantry in Operation Attleboro in the Boi Loi Woods. A few weeks later, Weyand moved up to be III Corp Commander. A new division commander took over and removed the second battalion from the pacification effort.

The "experiment" in military support of pacification died as quickly as it had been born, a casualty of the attempt to go against the grain of official military doctrine. Westmoreland and his close associates at MACV were deeply committed to the search-and-destroy, firepower, body-count approach to the war, and had little interest in any more political approach. A second factor--one that contributed to many of the military difficulties in Vietnam--was the U.S. Army's system of twelve-month rotation, which virtually ensured the transfer of every commander at about the time he began to understand the needs of the local situation. As a familiar adage put it, "We've fought the same war ten times."

The new commander of the 25th, General Memes, proved to be less flexible and less willing to cooperate with the Vietnamese. The favorable climate for experimentation was dissipated, and from that point the brigade and battalion commanders of the 25th Division were discouraged from attempting to apply a more sophisticated and selective approach.

The theory and practice of counterinsurgency never were taken seriously by most U.S. generals and field-grade officers in Vietnam. Counterinsurgency became simply the existence of a Civic Action/Psychological Warfare element according to the regulations; it required no doctrinal or tactical commitment to "winning hearts and minds." Most U.S. units regarded their Vietnamese counterparts as incompetent, and wanted them

out of the way so they could "open up" on the enemy. One officer observed that most Americans shared "a deep-seated feeling that pacification was a loser", and that coordination and cooperation with the Vietnamese was a waste of time. Therefore, American units won civic action points by sending food to orphanages and distributing tin and cement to refugees--projects which made for good press coverage but achieved little of meaning to the peasants.

After its brief experiment with pacification, the 25th Division reverted to a traditional military role, and its subsequent operations had a negative effect on the civilian populace in the area. The VC, who had suffered substantial losses during the heavy fighting of 1966 and were preparing themselves for the Tet offensive of 1968, minimized their offensive activities. There were no major attacks on towns or even outposts in the area during 1967; the VC would simply fire a few harassing mortar rounds at an outpost to keep U.S. troops pinned down in their bunkers while VC columns of men and supplies moved by at night. By the end of 1967, the province seemed quiet and secure; all roads were safe and negotiable. Hau Nghia was considered effectively pacified--until Tet.

CORDS was established in mid-1967 to coordinate pacification efforts, and its III Corps director, John Vann, developed an excellent working relationship with Weyand, then the commander of III Corps. Vann exercised substantial influence in his region; with the respect and approval of General Weyand, he was able to criticize division commanders when their operations caused problems to the CORDS advisers. In other regions, the deputy for CORDS had much less leverage over the corps commander and could not raise the overall priority of CORDS pacification programs, in relation to the conventional tactics of U.S. fighting units.

Despite the good relations between CORDS and the military command structure in III Corps, however, and despite the relatively dormant military situation for an extended period, the pacification program could not withstand the effects of the NLF's



Tet offensive. The U.S. military had been caught unprepared, and had suffered heavy losses. It was quick to blame the civilians in CORDS for not sharing the intelligence they had gained from their close contacts at the province, district, and village levels. For the rest of 1968, the relations between U.S. tactical forces and CORDS grew increasingly strained. The military planned and executed more of their operations secretly, bypassing CORDS' civilian and military advisors on grounds that the security of military operations might be compromised.

The 25th Division was caught up in this groundswell of antagonism and mistrust for CORDS. As the year progressed, the 25th mounted frequent operations which resulted in heavy civilian casualties and increasing popular resentment. By the end of 1968, there was an open rift between CORDS and the 25th Division in Hau Nghia Province. Part of the tension was generated by the GVN province chief, Colonel Nhon, who took an increasingly hostile stance toward the command of the 25th--a position in which he received some support from CORDS personnel. The 25th was receiving vocal criticism from pacification advisers, and it reciprocated with mistrust for the CORDS personnel. By the end of the year the 25th considered the CORDS province staff to be practically pro-VC and anti-25th. In one incident, a U.S. Military Police colonel encountered a CORDS official in a traffic jam and declared: "We're running a war here; get out of the way." It seemed to sum up the military attitude toward meaningful pacification.

In late 1968 and early 1969, the GVN mounted an Accelerated Pacification Campaign in an attempt to gain leverage at the Paris peace talks by recovering some of the territory and population it had 'lost' during the Tet offensive.

The 25th Division's contribution to this effort was a systematic series of heavy assaults on peasant villages by artillery strikes, helicopter-gunships, "recon by fire," and bulldozers. The commander of the 25th, the General Ellias Williamson, issued an order decreeing that by the end of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign, all VC-controlled "red areas" on the province pacification map would cease to exist, being transformed into pacified "blue areas." Battalion commanders began to put

pressure on the district advisers to upgrade their scores on MACV's "hamlet evaluation scale"--the index of pacification. They would roam the countryside with their units, passing through the red VC hamlets and reporting that since they had encountered no VC, the area could be regarded as pacified. The resulting statistics showed substantial progress which bore no relation to the reality in the field.

When a VC village was chosen for actual pacification by an element of the 25th, a U.S. unit would dig in and establish a small base camp for the night in the center of the village. The local VC would respond with a few rounds of mortars or grenades, which inevitably brought down a withering U.S. artillery barrage on all sides around the camp. The homes of the villagers were generally destroyed--if, indeed, they were still standing--the people became afraid to set foot in their village at night. The mere presence of a U.S. unit and its supporting artillery brought insecurity rather than security.

Pacification, therefore, rested on the terror inflicted by bullets and artillery shells, not on any attitudinal or ideological commitment to the GVN. This was a reality that could not be recorded in the 'hamlet evaluation' scores or fed into the MACV computers.

### The Delusion of 'Revolutionary Development'

The term "cadre," or can bo in Vietnamese, came into use during the Vietnamese struggle against the French in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It referred to the Viet Minh political organizers who carried the message of revolution from village to village. These cadre were among the most motivated and dedicated of the Viet Minh, and their work was highly effective. After the supposedly temporary partition of the country into a Northern and Southern regroupment zone, most of the Viet Minh cadre went to the North.

Diem's administration also used the term cadre, but it soon came to refer to any



official of the central government sent to work in rural areas. Even civil service workers and low-level bureaucrats came to be known as cadre. Where the rural population had held the Viet Minh cadre in high regard, the GVN functionaries were identified as representatives of a Saigon government that seemed to be concerned only with collecting high taxes and eradicating any loyalties or sympathies toward the Viet Minh and the National Liberation Front. It was the GVN cadre, therefore, who became the prime victims of "Communist terrorism." When the NLF kidnapped, assassinated, or expelled GVN cadre, many peasants perceived it not as an act of terrorism by a group of bandits or marauders, but as a political act directed against the most visible source of oppression and exploitation.

As this pattern of revolutionary violence expanded, the GVN responded with increasingly harsh forms of control and repression. They forced peasants off their land and into strategic hamlets, made them construct fortifications, taxed them heavily, used their women, and treated them with brutality and arrogance.

After the Diem regime was overthrown and the Strategic Hamlet program abandoned, the GVN continued to use many kinds of cadre in such pacification efforts as New Life Hamlets and Hop Tac, as well as in more general bureaucratic functions. Among political and administrative cadre there were New Life Hamlet cadre, Mobile Administrative cadre, Rural Political cadre, Chieu Hoi cadre, Vietnamese Information Service cadre, Hamlet Information cadre, and many others. Technical specialist cadre included groups with the titles of Health, Education, Agricultural, Youth, Labor and Social Welfare. By late 1965, when the control of the GVN had been reduced to the province capitals and some district towns, the cadre groups were working at cross purposes. All of these GVN employees had little or no effect on the rural areas of Vietnam, rarely straying far from the safety of urban areas.

This disorganized state prevailed until late 1965, when American and GVN pacifiers decided to pull all groups into one coordinated team--the Revolutionary Development

cadre program. It was hoped that this new effort would revive the original concept of "cadre" as developed and practiced by the Viet Minh and the NLF. Thus, by December 1965, only the groups designated as New Life Hamlet, Mobile Administration, Rural Political and Political Action Teams retained the title of cadre. Their training and organization was conducted at Vung Tau, the national training center set up in 1964 with the help of the CIA, and they were officially mobilized into the Revolutionary Development cadre in March 1966.

The RD Cadre program had other important antecedents besides the various earlier GVN cadre. Although the GVN and its American advisers had not been able to mount an effective or lasting pacification program on the national level, a number of local experiments had been tried by Vietnamese as well as American officials. In Kien Hoa Province in the Delta, for example, Province Chief Nguyen Van Chau had initiated ten-man groups, which he called People's Action Teams, to travel from hamlet to hamlet proselytizing for the GVN and its Strategic Hamlet Program. He had also experimented with what later came to be known as Census Grievance, in which paid informants in hamlets and villages would report to a provincial office on the complaints and aspirations of the peasants as well as on the NLF's infrastructure and activities.

In the early months of 1964, Frank Scotton and Robert Kelly, an Army officer on loan to AID, had developed a unique cadre operation in Quang Ngai Province called MIT (Motivation Indoctrination Training) or Armed Propaganda Teams. These were composed of about forty men--many of whom were ex-Viet Minh--who were given thirty days of intensive training<sup>in</sup>/motivation, indoctrination and propaganda techniques. The teams were heavily armed, clad in the peasant garb of black pajamas, and sent out to rural hamlets to attempt to root out the Viet Cong and win the population over to the GVN cause. These teams apparently had some limited and tentative success, for by the end of 1964 the CIA adopted the program, established the training center at Vung Tau, and began to recruit, train, and send out numerous cadre teams. By early 1965, Scotton and another USIS employee, Everett Bumgarner, had moved into Binh Dinh Province to work



with the dynamic Province Chief, Major Nguyen Be, on a variation of the Quang Ngai program. It was called PATs--Political Action Teams--and the teams were assigned to hamlets to eradicate the existing NLF structure and replace it with a GVN administration. By the end of 1965, the PATs had been churned out of Vung Tau in large numbers, and almost every province had four or five teams operating in it. The CIA not only trained the teams but maintained an operative in every province to monitor their progress, advise their leaders, and, of course, furnish their paychecks.

All of these early predecessors to the formal, nationwide RD Cadre program were derived from the revolutionary models of Viet Minh and NLF cadre. Such Americans and Vietnamese as Scotton, Vann, Chau, and Be possessed a fine appreciation of the skill and discipline of their adversary. They believed that if they could emulate and follow the techniques of the NLF cadre, they would be able to win a passive and apathetic rural population to the side of the GVN by the very same methods the NLF and the Viet Minh before them had used to foment a revolution. This was, indeed, the perennial hope and illusion of all the pacifiers: to make "our side" appear as benevolent, responsive, nationalistic, and progressive to the rural masses of Vietnamese peasants as the NLF. They never perceived that a new social order could not be introduced and implemented by the forces and personnel who represented the old and corrupt status quo; that social revolution could not be preached or practiced by a counter-revolutionary government, no matter how well-trained, well-motivated, well-organized, well-paid, and well-led its cadre might be.

During the latter half of 1965, many American and Vietnamese observers became convinced that the many, varied GVN cadre programs would have to be consolidated into a single, unified, and coordinated team. Part of the impetus came from General Nguyen Duc Thang, who headed the Ministry of Rural Construction, later to become the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, in the Ky government which took power in June. In July, Maxwell Taylor was replaced as Ambassador by Henry Cabot Lodge, who was determined to

increase the emphasis and priority given to pacification. With Lodge also came General Lansdale and a team of nineteen assigned to pacification or, as Lodge described it, "socially conscious practical politics, the by-product of which is effective counter-subversion/terrorism." The Mission Liaison Council under Deputy Ambassador William Porter was the principal forum where representatives of AID, MACV, CIA, along with such free-wheeling and influential officials as Scotton, Kelly, Bumgarner, and Vann, expanded their views and proposals for a reorganization of the pacification program. General Thang had brought in Colonel Chau to work with him in developing the fledgling Revolutionary Development program, and Chau was credited with formulating the essential doctrine and training program for the RD cadre. By February or March 1966, Major Le Xuan Mai was removed as commandant of the Vung Tau training center--according to some accounts because of his connections with the right-wing Dai Viet Party, and according to others because he was secretly advocating the overthrow of the Ky government to his cadre teams in training. Chau became the new commandant, and his close friend John Vann became the AID project manager for the RD cadre program as well as AID's official liaison to Vung Tau. MACV's <sup>planning</sup> J-33 pacification/office, appointed Captain Jean Sauvageot as its liaison to Vung Tau, so that the training center was no longer strictly the CIA's private domain. Vann, Sauvageot, Bumgarner, and others monitored the program from an operations center in Saigon as well as from Vung Tau itself. In Saigon, the chiefs of the various agencies in the U.S. Mission signed the order legitimizing the RD program: Westmoreland for MACV, Porter for the Embassy, Charles Mann for AID, and Barry Zorthian for JUSPAO. GVN Decree Number 137 was issued in February making Revolutionary Development the official policy.

The Revolutionary Development program was unveiled in February 1966 at the Honolulu Conference, where President Johnson and Marshal Ky mutually pledged to produce a "social revolution in the countryside." Johnson told his new special assistant for pacification, "some coonskins on the wall", or in more traditional English, he wanted to see Robert Komer, that he expected to see/tangible results and measurable progress in winning



"the other war" of pacification. The term Revolutionary Development was coined after the Honolulu Conference by Mission Council aides, since it seemed appropriately forceful, convincing, and progressive. There were great hopes that this new and massive pacification program would finally prove to be the means by which the people of Vietnam would be won away from the Communists and to the GVN. The Vietnamese name for the program, Xay Dung Nong Thon, translates literally to mean "rural reconstruction"---a label rejected by Lodge as too uninspiring, though it proved much more accurate. Ky understood that his regime could not advocate revolutionary change.

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The fifty-nine-man RD cadre teams were subject to constant revision and reorganization, but the basic format included a group leader who had an immediate staff of about six, including an intelligence officer, a deputy group leader, a radio operator, and several medics. There were thirty-four armed cadre called Political Action cells who were primarily responsible for securing and protecting the hamlet (and the RD cadre themselves) from expected Viet Cong attacks, as well as for maintaining the internal security of the hamlet by attempting to arrest or kill members of the Viet Cong infrastructure. Ten more cadre were assigned to the Civil Affairs section; some were in charge of Census Grievance activities, others were responsible for electing or appointing a new hamlet governing and administrative structure, and one or two were assigned the task of motivating and stimulating the hamlet residents to provide active support and assistance to the RD cadre. Finally, seven or eight men were designated New Life Development cells, responsible for such economic and social welfare programs as education, sanitation, land reform, agriculture, and construction projects. The essential emphasis of the program was evident in this structure; more than half the team members were strictly a para-military force designed to "protect" the hamlet from its own NLF administration, and another ten were concerned with gathering intelligence and establishing a new hamlet government more favorable to the GVN.

The goals of the RD cadre teams were set forth in an eleven-point program consisting of ninety-eight separate tasks and duties. If all the criteria were met as expected, a hamlet would receive the designation of Ap Doi Moi (Real New Life Hamlet). The eleven points reflected the priority placed on the functions of military security, intelligence-gathering, and political restructuring. First came the identification and destruction of the Viet Cong infrastructure; second, the elimination of corrupt and unpopular hamlet and village officials, which usually meant officials favoring the NLF more than the GVN; third, the rejuvenation of hamlet morale through propaganda disseminated by the motivation cadre; fourth, the organization of civic groups, a precise imitation of NLF technique; fifth, the organization of a hamlet defense system by arming some of the peasants to fight the VC and persuading them to build fortifications against VC incursions; sixth, the election or appointment of hamlet officials loyal to the GVN. The remaining five points dealt with social and economic improvements.

John Paul Vann defined the essential purpose of the cadre in his briefing paper of January 1966:

Cadre exists in South Viet Nam to provide a vital communications link between the government and the people. Their mission is to lay the foundation for the re-establishment of a functioning government presence in areas that have been dominated by the Viet Cong. Temporarily, they are required to fill the vacuums that exist in administration, self-defense, and economics. They achieve success when they are supplanted by indigenous hamlet members and when a conscious and overt commitment of the population to the side of the GVN occurs . . . .

The job of the cadre is to weed out the enemy's infrastructure, organize the population, establish local government, and install a loyal and patriotic infrastructure. Along with the military forces, cadre personnel are the representatives of the government to the bulk of the rural people who live in the villages. Their performance and example, whether good or bad, is interpreted as representing the policies and programs of the government.

Another document, dated November 1966, confirmed the basic strategy of the RD  
a  
cadre as one of militarily occupying/hamlet controlled or influenced by the NLF and



re-arranging the political system to fit into the GVN mold:

The RD Cadre serve as the GVN's presence in a hamlet or group of hamlets shortly after the VC have been 'cleared' from the area by military forces. They represent a firm GVN commitment to remain in the target area, to assure the benefits of government, and rebuild local pro-GVN government. They should be sent into only those areas in which the population is receptive to revolutionary development, into those areas in which the climate is right for building a strong anti-VC government and where local security is sufficient to permit their effective operations.

When they move on, they should leave behind them a functioning village-hamlet government and an ability and desire on the part of the people to participate in their own self-defense. If necessary, they may leave behind to assist in this crucial and difficult job a few of the original 59 men in the RD team.

An "Assessment of Revolutionary Development/Pacification" issued early in 1967 offered this definition of RD:

In its efforts to eliminate the Communist political apparatus as a subversive threat; to stabilize the economy so as to be able to prosecute a war; and to provide economic advancement and social opportunities to the Vietnamese people, the Government of South Viet Nam has adopted Revolutionary Development (RD). RD aims at reconstituting the fabric of Vietnamese society. The Government uses RD to extend its control over the land and the people so as ultimately to eliminate the Viet Cong political/guerrilla apparatus. RD has the objective of establishing the Government's presence in the countryside and through a combination of political, security, economic, social, and psychological activities to develop a responsive attitude of the people toward the Government.

On August 1, 1966, Frank Scotton wrote a revealing memo to Daniel Ellsberg, then on Lansdale's staff, in response to Ellsberg's request for a clarification of the essential concepts involved in the new RD cadre program. He began by discussing the difference between reform and revolution: the latter proceeding from the bottom of society to the top, the former proceeding from top to bottom. Reform, he acknowledged, could not be achieved until the privileged classes at the top had actively tried to reform themselves. The lack of reform at the top was the pre-conditions for revolution. Scotton continued:

The Revolutionary Development program which Americans talk about in Vietnam, and which Vietnamese call Rural Construction, is not revolution at all. We should disabuse ourselves of the illusion of a term which has acquired great mystique and little understanding in official circles. When we say Revolutionary Development we are meaning a program of sponsored reform. Ironically,

the failure to recognize the program for what it is and the resulting lack of insistence and pressure for absolute reform may be the first link in a final drive for real revolution led and directed by the only alternative: the People's Liberation Front. So, by failing to understand what it is we are really about, we assist those forces which we most want to defeat!

Scotton went on to advocate the use of the terms reform and rural construction, contending that a true reform movement with impressive leadership would not require such ideologically-motivated cadre as the Communists had in the field, but only what he called "numerous and broadly-based activists" who would show their deep concern for reform. Scotton added:

To be successful the reform group must have imposing inspirational leadership and numerous broadly-based activists. Both levels must be united by real commitment to the goals of the reform movement. How much more true this is for an arena in which the reform movement is competing against a revolutionary group as well as the reactionary elements!

Scotton listed four essential requirements of the leadership for reform:

1. The leadership must have imagination sufficient to demonstrate to the activists that they, the leaders, are reformers.
2. The leadership essentially fills in many respects the role played by cadre in a revolutionary movement. The leadership must sacrifice conspicuously.
3. Reform must proceed at all levels of responsibility simultaneously, otherwise there will be a vicious morale problem for the activists.
4. Those who resist reform or prostitute standards must be removed.

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In 1966, the first official year of its operation, the RD program and its cadre teams took as their basic objectives the "construction" of almost 2,000 New Life Hamlets and the "securing" of almost two million peasants in the rural areas. This represented about one seventh of the total number of hamlets and the same portion of the total population of southern Viet Nam. Charles Mohr, a New York Times correspondent, reported in September 1966 that General Thang, the head of the RD Ministry, was actually aiming for completion of only about 70 per cent of these ambitious goals.

The first class of RD cadre, about 4,700 men, completed its thirteen-week training course at Vung Tau in May and was sent out to assigned hamlets in fifty-nine-man



teams. Two other classes completed the training course by the end of the year, bringing the number of newly trained cadre to almost 15,000 men. Another 12,000 to 15,000 men were still operating in the former PAT teams, so that the GVN had approximately 28,000 RD workers in the field by the end of 1966. But Mohr reported that less than half of these teams, and probably a much smaller percentage, actually were having any positive effect on pacifying their assigned hamlets. In fact, according to one official document, only 440 New Life Hamlets were completed in accord with the six basic criteria for pacification, and only about a million people came under GVN control during 1966. These limited RD achievements revealed a sizable discrepancy between the goals set for the RD cadre and the actual results in the field. The document questioned whether even these statistics were reliable:

Numerical data, however, can be misleading, as was the experience in past pacification efforts. Pressure to reach goals has caused superficial accomplishment and exaggerated reporting....Too often goals are unrealistic and fail to take into account the Viet Cong's capability to disrupt pacification. Reports indicated that some provinces in 1966 overstated accomplishments in order to maximize their achievements.

An important factor in the poor performance of the RD cadre teams in 1966 could be found in the very nature of the cadre themselves, and the methods by which they were recruited and trained. In January 1966, just before RD was formalized at Honolulu and the RD cadre teams began training, John Vann gave his views as to the recruitment and training procedures of the new cadre:

Cadre members are recruited from their home areas, are trained at the National Cadre Training Center at Vung Tau, and are returned as members of an organized and trained team to their home areas to conduct pacification operations. Cadre members are typical villagers and maintain their village attitudes and aspirations. The training program is designed to work with typical villagers who have been recruited for cadre operations and the entire training function is based on techniques designed to motivate and train village people to return to their home areas and to make them work with and train and motivate people like themselves to support the government.

But in November of the same year, in an official USAID briefing paper on the use and deployment of the RD cadre teams, the U.S. advisers from different agencies were



told, by implication, to correct two basic flaws in the program:

....Team members should be from the District in which they work.

The cadre teams must be better selected; they should come largely from the countryside and not--as is often the case now--from the cities and towns. A common criticism now is that the cadre are too young, and thus lack the population's confidence. Where possible, emphasis on recruitment should be placed on seniority.

By the end of December, General Thang was frankly discussing glaring failures of the cadre recruitment policy:

It has been experienced by the RD National Training Center of Vung Tau that "the trainees of the past training courses counted 30 percent of rural elements and the remaining 70 percent were urban youths."

It has been testified also that the RD ranks have included a very great number of draft-dodgers and deserters. Many of them have enlisted into the RD only for profit and sabotage. Others proved lacking in capabilities and good will because they were recruited in a hurry by local agencies who did not put enough time for a good selection of each individual. They even accepted elements involved in robberies, reactionary activities, and relations with the VC....Therefore, cadres of urban origins can hardly adapt themselves to the rural environment....

These official statements about the quality of the cadre recruited for the RD teams indicate that the "activists" which the GVN leadership was calling on to implement its program of "sponsored reform" were not the kind who could demonstrate their concern, dedication, and enthusiasm for helping the rural hamlet-dwellers toward a better life. The young men who signed up for the RD program were indeed a mixed lot, as Thang suggested. Some were hooligans and criminals and deserters; others were the sons of prominent GVN officials who were buying their way out of military service in the ARVN. Their pay was low, their desertion rate was high, and their motivation to help and assist their rural compatriots was tempered by a desire to survive the constant threat of VC attack while maintaining their customary life style in the district and province capitals. They wore black pajamas like the peasants, but often pointed black shoes or carefully manicured fingernails would protrude from their costumes--both clear signs of their urban background. The peasants tended to view them with disdain, if not outright suspicion and hostility. Some referred to the cadre as "cowboys,"



the same derogatory epithet used to describe Premier Nguyen Cao Ky. Many of the fifty-nine-man cadre teams were so poorly led that they came to be known as buy qua den, or black-crow gangs, the crow being regarded as an idiot bird by the Vietnamese. Undoubtedly, some teams made a better impression and achieved some positive impact on their assigned hamlets, but there seem to have been isolated exceptions to the general rule.

For one thing, the quality of the instructors at the Vung Tau training center left much to be desired. Major Mai, who ran the center under the aegis of the CIA until June 1966, indoctrinated many of the Political Action Teams with the ideology of an anti-GVN faction. His successor, Colonel Chau, hired almost 1,000 instructors, most of whom were poorly trained themselves and hardly qualified for the job. The 4,700 RD students who arrived for the first cadre training course were drummed up hastily and indiscriminately in the cities and province towns, and many had previously served as low-level workers and administrators in the Strategic Hamlet Program and some of its successors. The Province Chiefs were given quotas to fill in the recruitment of potential cadre for each training class, and one American correspondent noted:

Since the cadre will return to that province after training, province chiefs can be expected to pick recruits on whose loyalties they can rely, certainly not ones who might be overzealous in relaying peasants' complaints about provincial officialdom to Saigon.

It was not just the province chiefs who contributed to the poor quality and ineffectiveness of the RD cadre teams. There was misunderstanding and mistrust of the RD program on the part of the GVN corps commanders, the ARVN division commanders, the district chiefs, as well as various high-level Saigon ministers and bureaucrats. The military commanders, including the province and district chiefs, balked at deploying available troops for the protection of the RD cadre at work. This lack of security resulted in a high casualty and desertion rate, and RD teams frequently left their hamlets in the late afternoon to sleep in the comparative safety of the district or province towns. District chiefs would often use the cadre as a military force helping to guard a bridge, supply depot, or even their own district compounds. Both province

and district chiefs saw the RD program as an opportunity to rake off large quantities of funds and material supplies intended for economic development projects in the RD hamlets. And, of course, the usual fabrication and exaggeration of statistical data was frequently practiced by province chiefs whose primary concern was the favorable impression they could create in Saigon. Thus, one province chief would move his teams from more difficult and insecure hamlets to easier ones to boost his performance scores; another would claim that the same hamlet was pacified several times over; and still others might pull RD cadre teams out of hamlets before their work had even neared completion and assign them to new hamlets so that the province pacification charts could show a high number of supposedly pacified hamlets. Even the leaders of the cadre teams inevitably became enmeshed in corruption, mismanagement, and official indifference toward the RD program. Often the leaders were not even present with their teams in the hamlets, but could be found still lingering in Vung Tau or Saigon. It was not uncommon for the group leaders to partake of graft in collusion with a local province or district chief. In sum, the poor quality and performance of the cadre activists in 1966 was a direct reflection of the actions and attitudes of the leadership at all levels of the GVN.

The American advisers were impatient for positive results, and so the RD cadre program was pushed hard and fast--much like the other pacification programs that had preceded it. This enthusiasm was not shared, however, by many of the American military in the field, who viewed the cadre teams as merely another project in the CIA's bag of tricks, somewhat similar to the Green Berets and designed to outmaneuver the Viet Cong at their own game. While the rhetoric of Revolutionary Development poured from official spokesmen in Saigon and Washington, the program received only a hesitant reception from Americans in the field.

It was the CIA which felt the greatest pressure to "show results" for the program. It was compelled rapidly to recruit additional personnel to carry the black payroll



bags and administer the logistics for the increasing numbers of cadre teams in the provinces. Personnel was recruited in the U.S., given brief and inadequate training, and sent out into the provinces of Vietnam. Inevitably, the quality and efficiency of the CIA's performance suffered as it attempted to expand at the same rate as the cadre teams. Finally, the CIA realized it could not administer such a large and cumbersome program, and it extricated itself by 1969, handed it over to MACV, and went back to its routine covert intelligence activities.

The intense pressure from American officials at the highest levels for "proof" of "success" consistently undermined the validity of the reporting process from the field. Hamlets and villages that had been governed by the Viet Minh and NLF for almost twenty years were to be "pacified" and rendered loyal to the GVN in three short months.

By the end of 1966, the Americans were operating in a fantasy world of false optimism based on inaccurate and unreliable reporting of the RD cadre program and its progress. Anyone who raised a skeptical voice against the official line was viewed disloyal or at least uncooperative--"not a team player." One former official recounted that he had made a thorough evaluation of the performance and effects of the RD cadre for the newly-formed Office of Civil Operations at the end of 1966, only to be told by the CIA Station Chief that he would have the report declared invalid if it were sent back to Washington in that present form. The CIA man said the report could destroy the morale of both the cadre and their American advisers, and added: "You are going to dignify something which never should have happened, by reporting it."

Frank Wisner, who worked closely with Deputy Ambassador Porter in 1966 and early 1967 on all aspects of pacification, later related how American officials at all levels fell into the habit of <sup>measur</sup> measuring progress in the RD program by the number of schools built, rifles handed out, barbed wire put in place, pigs and chickens delivered to peasants for "self-help" projects, and a long list of other indices which could be measured and quantified. This was the essential thrust of Robert Komer's first com-

prehensive report on "the other war" to President Johnson in September 1966--a document studded with impressive statistics purporting to show substantial progress in achieving the goals of pacification. Such data deceived American officials all the way up to the White House into thinking pacification was succeeding, whereas the rural peasants had seen little change and had certainly made no "overt and conscious commitment to the GVN." "The basic body of the ship was sinking, while only the stern was still visible above the water," Wisner observed.

In December 1966, Daniel Ellsberg captured the reality of pacification in a memorandum he called "The Day Loc Tien Was Pacified." He told of attending the ceremony of a hamlet in Long An Province which had officially met the six-point criteria of the RD cadre teams and was therefore considered pacified. The local GVN district chief had authorized the ceremony though the cadre had only been working in the hamlet for ten weeks. As the MACV district advisor whom Ellsberg accompanied to Loc Tien commented: "They're anxious to finish up their 1966 program so they can get started on the 1967 hamlets." To meet the first pacification criterion--clearing out the VC and setting up hamlet defenses and fortifications--the cadre had built a long and utterly useless earthen wall around part of the hamlet. For the second criterion--taking a census and gathering information from the people about their grievances and aspirations--Ellsberg found that the RD cadre had perfunctorily visited each home, asked a few simple questions, and left a metal doorsign on the porch. The third objective of the cadre was to eliminate the Viet Cong political apparatus from the hamlet, but in Loc Tien neither the hamlet chief elected with the help of the RD cadre nor the cadre themselves slept there at night, choosing instead to go to the nearby district town where some ARVN troops were stationed. For the fourth criterion--the implementation of various "self-help and development projects," Ellsberg noticed only a wooden arch with the name of the hamlet painted on it--and the cadre had constructed this by themselves. Ellsberg asked a woman of the hamlet about the fifth criterion--organizing the people into interest groupings for the purpose of "self-defense"--and was told



that her husband had simply been assigned to "the men's organization," though he did not understand what the purpose of it was. The sixth criterion for successful pacification was the election of local hamlet officials; Ellsberg discovered that just a week before the ceremony the Viet Cong had come and taken off the recently elected hamlet chiefs. Yet the ceremony was still held because the cadre quickly installed the assistant hamlet chiefs into the empty positions.

Ellsberg recorded a short conversation he had with the cadre leader, who reinforced his own convictions about how effectively Loc Tien had been pacified:

...This hamlet is too insecure to be pacified. Twelve PFs are not enough to protect the people. If ARVN troops would come, and stay here, and operate at night, there would be a chance; but when ARVN comes at all, the units leave at four, five o'clock, and at night the VC come. The RF outpost will not make much difference to the people, because the RFs will stay inside their post at night. The cadre were not here long enough to accomplish anything; but even if they had been here much longer, they could not have changed the people's attitudes, because the people are afraid. The six-point criteria have been met, but only on paper.

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The RD cadre plan for 1966 sought to pacify only four key areas where U.S.-GVN military strength was preponderant, and the teams were not sent too far from the GVN-controlled province and district towns. In fact, many cadre teams could be found in 1966 working to pacify hamlets which were within the city limits or just on the outskirts of a town. One particularly candid rationale for emphasizing certain areas in the pacification plan for 1966 was given in an official MACV information pamphlet:

But, according to a U.S. official in Saigon, it would take about 3 million good troops to put a ring around all the villages in Vietnam and interlock them for a complete protection of the people. "It goes like this," he said. "If we put ten soldiers to guard a village, the VC would bring in 100 guerrillas and overrun us. If we put in 100 troops, they would bring in 1,000."

"So, we have to go to a battalion, and we would need 3.2 million troops, and every hamlet would become a concentration camp with constant checking of ID cards.

"It's conceivable but not practical."

So, instead of attempting to equally pacify the entire country as was attempted in programs of previous years, priority areas have been selected for the new Revolutionary Development effort where security can be provided.

The first priority area was Quang Nam Province in I Corps, and especially the area in the immediate vicinity of Da Nang city. When the Marines began landing there in March 1965, they were subjected to heavy mortar and sniper fire from the densely populated area around Da Nang. Their response to this omnipresent threat of danger from a rural population well under the banner of the NLF was summed up by their commander, Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt:

I had a study made and it turned out that 180,000 people lived within 81-mm mortar range of our airfield. That meant that we could not have real security unless we could get those people on our side, so we went into the pacification business ourselves.

The Marine technique was military occupation. Unlike the U.S. Army units, the Marines broke down their brigade and division-sized base camps and set up battalion and company base camps amidst the hamlets and villages. They then mounted small-scale reconnaissance patrols and ambushes, in contrast to the Army's massive search-and-destroy operations. The Marines also initiated the CAP, or Combined Action Platoon, consisting of a heavily armed squad of marines stationed alongside a local PF platoon in a hamlet area. And, of course, the Marines became renowned for their benevolent exploits in civic action projects, building hamlet schools, digging wells, passing out candy, and adopting orphaned children as mascots. But this form of pacification by military occupation was still only partially effective in 1965 and 1966, since the NLF was so deeply embedded in the sympathetic and supportive population, and since the GVN was so inefficient and unwilling to step in behind the Marines and exercise any meaningful authority. One official American assessment of the progress of RD pacification in the Da Nang priority area described the situation in these terms:

Pacification has been painfully slow in this area, however, because the Vietnamese have not stepped in rapidly to establish the governmental apparatus and to prevent restoration of the Viet Cong infrastructure. The "Struggle Movement" in the spring of 1966 disrupted the GVN's effort. The deeply imbedded VC infrastructure also handicapped progress. Only about 25 per cent of the 1966 goal in hamlet construction was accomplished.

The second priority pacification area was Binh Dinh Province in upper II Corps, and particularly the area around the coastal city of Qui Nhon. Binh Dinh had always



been a Viet Minh and NLF stronghold, and by the early summer of 1965 the GVN had dissolved its administration in three out of eleven districts of the province. The government's jurisdiction did not extend much beyond the enclaves of Qui Nhon city and a few fortified ARVN base camps, and the NLF was the dominant force for the great majority of the people living in the countryside of Binh Dinh, to the extent that even Qui Nhon came under attack in mid-1965. But for the rest of 1965 and all of 1966, much of the area around Qui Nhon as well as other portions of the province were claimed as limited but successful examples of pacification. This success was due partly to the dynamic performance of Province Chief Nguyen Van Be, who effectively operated the PAT teams and later the RD cadre teams before he became commandant at Vung Tau. But the overwhelming reason for the progress in pacification was the sheer weight and impact of a large influx of military force--first elements of a U.S. Marine division, then the First Air Cavalry Division at An Khe, and finally the Korean Tiger Division based near Qui Nhon; all these forces "augmented" the beleaguered ARVN 22nd Division. The American troops' brand of pacification was marked by Operations Masher, Irving, and Thayer, with their excessive use of firepower and the large-scale displacement and relocation of the rural population.

The third priority area for pacification in the RD program for 1966 was the region surrounding Saigon, including the entire provinces of Hau Nghia, Long An, Gia Dinh, Phuoc Tuy, Bien Hoa, and Binh Duong. About 20 per cent of Vietnam's population was concentrated in these provinces, and the NLF was spreading its control up to the outskirts of Saigon itself. The Hop Toc pacification program of 1964 had proved ineffective, and even with the injection of various American Army units during 1965 and 1966, the III Corps priority area had not made much progress in pacifying the rural areas outside of Saigon and the province and district towns. The official assessment of the state of pacification by the end of 1966 was depressing:

In fact, at the end of November 1966 only thirty one hamlets were secured out of a target of 301, amounting to only 10 per cent of the RD goal. The ineffectiveness of ARVN in providing the essential security shield for pacifica-

tion contributed to the decision to experiment in Long An with a U.S. battalion to provide local security for RD. Although it is too early to evaluate the results of the experiment, one survey of hamlet dwellers indicates that the introduction of U.S. troops increased confidence in the ability of the government to protect the hamlets. Latent fears existed, however, that U.S. troops would cause a rise in prices and harder times. Fear of air strikes and artillery also picked up. On the balance, however, U.S. troops caused a favorable impact according to the survey. Local officials qualified this assessment by saying that serious disciplinary problems could reverse this trend since there was potential resentment against foreign soldiers which would be exploited by the VC if serious incidents should occur.

Thus, the strength and durability of the NLF, as well as the inability and reluctance of the ARVN units to support the RD program, made it necessary to introduce an army of occupation to carry out effective pacification. A battalion of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division which was assigned to Long An, and the "favorable impression" noted above could not have lasted long. The 9th Division, under the command of General Julian Ewell, became well-known for its remarkable body count ratios, produced by an inordinate number of civilian casualties. John Vann, as Deputy for CORDS in the summer of 1969, had to press for the removal of the 9th from the populous Delta so that the new pacification program could proceed without being jeopardized by a reckless and heavy-handed U.S. division.

The fourth and last priority area centered around the province of An Giang, deep in the Mekong Delta, and some of the provinces contiguous to it. There were no U.S. troops in this region, and the province was considered the most secure and pacified of any in Vietnam because it was predominantly populated by members of the Hoa Hao religious sect, who were vehemently anti-NLF. In neighboring Vinh Long and Phong Binh provinces, however, RD teams encountered the same problems and weaknesses they had met elsewhere in Vietnam, and Sa Dec Province, which was also part of the IV Corps pacification priority area in 1966 and 1967, received a conventional dose of pacification--intensive and systematic bombing, defoliation, free-fire, and depopulation.

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Security for the pacification teams was a critical problem of the RD program.



MACV perceived this crucial weakness but was unwilling to shift any of its own units from search-and-destroy missions and combat against main-force enemy units. It was decided, therefore, that ARVN would be relieved of most of its search-and-destroy duties (which it rarely performed anyway), and at least half of its battalions would be assigned in 1967 to provide RD cadre teams with security from large-scale VC attack. General Westmoreland was briefed on the plan in September and received it enthusiastically, and Premier Ky was persuaded to accept it at the Manila Conference in October.

In the waning months of 1966, therefore, the ARVN was primed for its new and all-important role in providing protection for the pacification program. Troops were put through a two-week crash course in discipline, conduct, and "the importance of winning the confidence and support of the people." Civic action projects were also to be carried out in order to woo the rural population to the side of the GVN, and ARVN units were to be placed under the operational command of the local province chief. As one American official said: "What better mission for ARVN...than protecting their country's most precious possession--its people." But ARVN's past performance inspired little confidence in its new mission. One correspondent noted:

The shift of ARVN assignments is regarded mainly as an act of despair--an effort to get some value out of ARVN in view of its failure as a first-line fighting force. ARVN officers think they are suffering a major loss of face. Division commanders, for example, will be downgraded progressively to administrative roles as their battalions are assigned to the control of province chiefs. Effective pacification, moreover, requires incessant night patrols and ambush laying to intercept the Viet Cong, tasks few ARVN units have ever been willing to do despite years of pressure from American advisors. "I suppose a lot of ARVN units will take all this as license to sit and do nothing," said one cynical American official. As counter-productive as doing nothing might seem, ARVN troops could do even worse if they continue to treat the peasants as badly as they have in the past--for example, driving trucks at break-neck speeds through congested hamlets.

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By September 1, 1967, General Thang and the Ministry of Revolutionary Development were ready to look back at the failings of the RD program during the first eight months of the year and announce an increased effort for the remainder of 1967 and 1968. Thang was able to claim 149 New Life Hamlets (Ap Doi Mai) out of a 1967 goal of 575; sixty-



seven Consolidated Hamlets (Ap Cung Co) out of an expected 329, and twenty-seven Pacific Hamlets (Ap Binh Dinh) out of a planned 219. The total strength of the RD cadre was 31,200 organized into 487 teams--barely an increase over the 28,000 cadre who had been operating in the provinces at the end of 1966. Thang offered his own analysis of the RD program's failures:

Taking a general outlook on the RD program for the whole year, although some relatively solid progress has been accomplished, we cannot pass over a certain number of essential weaknesses in silence. So far, some local official circles have remained indifferent to the RD activities which are considered as those (solely) of the cadres and have maintained their uninterested attitude with respect to providing support, coordination, and assistance. In several localities, special attention has not been paid to the RD program; as their plans have lacked practicability, from the Hamlet Construction Program to various New Life Development Programs, changes have occurred frequently. The weak military support and the changes recorded to the security conditions constitute the weaknesses which are worthy of our special attention. In some RD campaigns, the supporting military units have not understood well their role of providing support. They have persisted to stay in a passive position, waiting for the attacks of the enemy instead of carrying on an active search of the enemy in their assigned areas. Other campaigns have been organized and operated loosely and the spirit at all command levels has lacked energy. Concerning the RD cadres, beside the good teams showing some eagerness in their activities, others have been too weak concerning spirit and technical abilities. However, in general, almost all the RD cadre teams have strongly clung to the areas to which they have been assigned for carrying out their missions. Besides, the admission of new cadres to make up the losses suffered (defectors, killed, wounded, etc.) has still been so weak that the creation of more cadre teams could not reach the expected level. The New Life Development Programs have not progressed strongly during the first six months of the year because with a lack of positivism, a certain number of technical agencies have considered these programs as belonging to the Ministry of RD, but not to the technical ministries concerned....

Thang added some blunt remarks which cut to the core of the problem:

Corruption and frauds have been dominating the situation and in some areas they have spread like a plague, causing delay to the RD activities and sabotaging every program from its very roots due to a loss of confidence and a discouragement created in the minds and hearts of the people and of the army, cadres, and government at the executive level. The army, cadres and government at all levels have the duty to introduce at all costs the RD ideal into the minds and hearts (of the people) in our present activities against the Communists and for the construction of our country.

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A detailed account of the RD program in one province--Long An, a flat and densely populated Delta plain--is available from documents compiled by some American advisors



in Long An and included in a report dated November 30, 1967.

The report acknowledged that Long An had always been dominated by the NLF. At the time the GVN controlled 15 to 20 per cent of the land area by daylight, but at night "control is limited to the boundaries of the provincial and district capitals and to perimeters of military forces." The Long An Pacification Plan, patterned after the national strategic concept of pacification, consisted first of a "clearing" phase--a military offensive by American and ARVN units to defeat or at least push back the large enemy units threatening the safety of the RD teams. This was to be followed by a "securing" or Revolutionary Development phase, in which the remaining Viet Cong infrastructure and local guerrillas were to be eliminated and replaced with a hamlet government more amenable to the GVN. The third phase was referred to as "developing" or nation-building, which was intended to "complete the development of nationwide, political, economic, and social institutions necessary for a viable, free, non-communist Republic of Viet-Nam." It was contemplated that the three phases could take place simultaneously, with primary emphasis on eradicating the NLF militarily from the areas and hamlets where the RD teams would be working.

Eight RD cadre teams were operating in various hamlets of Long An in November 1967, and the report included a brief proficiency report for each. The first team was said to have accomplished very little:

What good has been done is undone each night as the team pulls out and leaves the hamlet to the VC. The standard items have been accomplished, i.e., Census, pretty maps, meetings, elections, hamlet self-defense; but the hamlet chief ran off the day after he was pressured into running for election and the "appointed" hamlet self-defense ran off the following day. Therefore, we can say that a superficial job has been done to date with not too much in-depth work.

Team Number Two was also weak and doing a superficial job, but its main problem was the fact that it had to maintain the hamlet's security at night because the nearby ARVN outpost would not budge from its camp. The third team was given credit for generally satisfactory performance, and a Vietnamese Ranger unit was complimented on the protection it provided and its admirable conduct. But this assessment was in conflict with



an account of the Rangers given elsewhere in the report:

The Ranger unit is considered a top fighting organization. Townspeople have, however, asked the province chief to have it withdrawn from the province because of its wild behavior with the citizenry in the provincial capital. There have been firefights in town between elements of the Rangers and other ARVN forces. These are considered to be the fault of the Rangers. Other ARVN battalions have a good record in garrison and are not unfriendly toward the people. However, on patrol all units take poultry and fruit in the hamlets and are carelessly destructive to rice fields and peasant property. War damage claims are backlogged as much as two years, and the townspeople and farmers are angry that GVN will not reimburse them for their losses.

In any case, the Rangers were moved out of Team Three's hamlet, and security was expected to deteriorate under the protection of the "notoriously bad" Fourth Battalion of the 50th Regiment. The remaining five teams were generally considered to have accomplished their goals to one degree or another, though none of the descriptions of their work seemed thoroughly convincing.

Inadequate military support and security provided by the various GVN forces in Long An Province were noted in the report as major difficulties facing the RD teams:

The cadre are being used in the hamlets as front-line security elements either to replace non-existent ARVN support or to help provide security for the ARVN units. This is completely contrary to all directives, but since the Vietnamese 25th Division by and large will not support the RD effort, the protection of the hamlets falls to the cadre. In fact, in several cases the cadre are being forced to provide security for ARVN units or to provide flank security for ARVN units. Team One has one RF company and one ARVN company assigned to its hamlet to provide direct security. The ARVN unit holes up in two houses in the center of the hamlet and will not go out to patrol or ambush. The cadre and the RF unit must provide the hamlet security for the hamlet inhabitants and the ARVN company. Team Two has one RF company and one ARVN company assigned for direct hamlet security. The ARVN company will not enter the hamlet; rather it squires up in a fortified compound in an adjacent hamlet where it makes no attempt to patrol or ambush. They have told the cadre and the RF that they must provide protection for the hamlet, both internal and external.

These conditions also prevailed for the other six RD teams. Furthermore, the ARVN units would often tear down the unoccupied houses in a hamlet in order to procure building materials for their own bunkers and defensive positions. In one case, a woman with ten children returned from Saigon, where she had visited her wounded husband, an ARVN soldier, and found only the shell of her house remaining.



Other GVN forces proved little better. The morale of the RF and PF soldiers was generally low, and both groups participated in petty graft on the black market in order to earn enough money to get by. The CIA-led and financed Provincial Reconnaissance Units were described as "specialists in organized mayhem," and the company of heavily-armed and allegedly mobile National Police Field Forces were being misused by the province chief as his own personal protection. As for the National Police, whom the Vietnamese generally referred to as "white mice,"

Resources control police stop civilians and private vehicles and some are known to charge illegal fees on goods transported through check posts. It is rumored that the money goes to the wife of the province chief....Police active in the National Identity Registration Program are said to charge 1,000 piasters for an identity card and that ages may be altered for 5,000 piasters. Rural people recognize the National Police as a government representative who maintains order through the imposition of fines for petty offenses, collects taxes from buses and markets, but they do not recognize the role of the police in the maintenance of public security.

The report indicated that the U.S. brigade in Long An, an element of the 9th Infantry Division and the first American ground unit to be assigned to the Mekong Delta, had already developed friction and misunderstanding with the CORDS advisory team in the province. Coordination and communication problems were severe, and "all too often there is no attempt to iron the problem out; they only cuss each other and let it go." The immediate effects of the U.S. brigade on the Long An province capital were described in these words:

Shortly after its arrival, prices began to rise in the capital where the brigade is temporarily stationed. Many bars have been built in the capital and many women from Saigon and the local area are employed there. The streets have become congested, dusty, and are breaking up as a result of the heavy military traffic. Some of the bar girls are said to earn more per month than the Premier of Viet-Nam and they are displacing the traditional class as the wealthy elite. Cyclo drivers and car washers are earning more money than major provincial officials. The townspeople are beginning to complain openly about these problems.

If these were the benefits an American unit brought to a previously placid province capital, it was little wonder that the NLF would "exploit...the potential resentment against foreign soldiers...if serious incidents should occur."

There was one other major problem besetting the RD cadre teams in their attempts



at pacification: corruption. The Long An report provided this illustration:

Corruption among GVN officials is another big detracting factor. The cadre are led down the primrose path of changing the corrupt old life into the new shining life. Unfortunately, most GVN officials haven't been led down this path. It does not take the cadre long to find out that most of their efforts to change the lives of the people are met with resistance by GVN officials dedicated to the perpetration of greed, corruption, and power. When faced with this, one can see why two cadre leaders are now charged with selling AID commodities on the black market. These were commodities that had been stolen from the cadre that were destined to be given to the people in the hamlet.

In another instance, the cadre inspector sent down from the RD Ministry in Saigon demanded that the province provide him with a new house and a jeep, which could usually be seen on the streets of Saigon rather than in his new home. A provincial cadre official who made an attempt to weed out some other officials for padding the payroll was promptly recalled to Saigon and given a reprimand. The report mentioned the ARVN major who served as the deputy for security to the province chief in Long An, and who "who would like to control and monitor all the programs in the province, and operates under the creed that all programs should be control devices, that nothing should be given to the people without a substantial return in loyalty or information." Participation in the RD program of the powerful and unpredictable commander of the ARVN 25th Division, General Phan Trong Chin, was termed "premeditated interference. The province chief has complained to the Cadre officer that he is hampered in doing more for the teams because General Chin will not permit him to do more."

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On January 26, 1968, General Thang resigned as a deputy chief of staff of the ARVN. Even in mid-1967, he had said skeptically that "although rural institutions go by the name of 'new life' hamlets, the truth of the matter is that they have not provided a new life for the peoples in the hamlets." By the time he resigned, Thang had despaired of the possibility that the GVN would ever reform itself enough to carry out a convincing program of pacification and rural construction. The immediate issue which led to Thang's decision to quit was a reorganization plan he had proposed, through which he sought to end the rivalry, dissension, and corruption plaguing the GVN at



all levels of the governing structure. In so doing, he hoped to put a stop to the 'warlordism' that was sacrificing the RD program to the whims and allegiances of various Vietnamese corps and division commanders who controlled the province and district chiefs. As the still-anonymous author of a paper entitled Pacification Administration put it,

...efforts to concentrate responsibility and control of pacification in the hands of the Minister of Revolutionary Development met with little long-term success for several reasons: (1) other ministers were jealous and somewhat afraid of too great a concentration of power; (2) the scope and complexity of pacification are such that they are beyond the control of a single operator.. ..In mid-1966 the Minister of Revolutionary Development was given control over the Ministries of Public Works, Agriculture, and Youth and limited control with respect to management of provincial military forces. He also was given responsibility for an increased number of socio-economic programs, notably land reform. This led to some improvements in program functioning, yet it allowed the Minister little time to devote to any one area. It also led to distrust and jealousy on the part of other ministers, and the corps commanders, who began to resist attempts to improve the pacification program, and ultimately led to the Minister's resignation. For one individual to control all pacification resources--cadre, funds, local administrators, national police, and military forces--would be considered too powerful in a politically unstable country such as Vietnam.

Thang, though hardly the ideal administrator, had made enemies with his driving zeal and initiative. The "leadership for sponsored reform" which Frank Scotton had tried to generate out of a perpetually corrupt and, illegitimate GVN, failed to materialize and activate the genuine reform movement which was to take the wind out of the sails of the revolution.



A Final Assessment

The extent to which the strategy of pacification failed in South Vietnam can be seen in assessments made by the Johnson Administration as it was leaving office. These revealed that, despite the overwhelming American presence in Vietnam from 1965 through 1968, security in the countryside did not appreciably improve; nor did the government succeed in destroying the NLF military-political organization throughout South Vietnam. The GVN was slowly extending its military control over the country while failing to consolidate its political control among the people--thus forging a tenuous progress easily reversible by a new NLF-NVA offensive.

The State Department and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) criticized the chief measure of progress in pacification, the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), as a form of self-delusion. Supposedly a quantitative measure of pacification progress, HES suffered from flaws which helped inflate the percentage of hamlets listed under GVN control. HES had no sophisticated way of measuring political developments. It often relied on the judgment of a foreigner, i.e., an American. The hamlet adviser was actually being asked to evaluate his own work, "thus requiring," noted the Defense Department, "a somewhat inhuman capacity for honesty and objectivity". The adviser could not possibly visit all the hamlets he was required to evaluate or give sufficient time to those hamlets he did manage to visit. Much of the information had to be accepted from GVN sources which were not always trustworthy. Upper echelons exerted pressure upon local advisors to show progress in their reports. Moreover, unless the component statistics were examined, the gross estimates of HES seriously distorted the analysis of the security situation in South Vietnam.

The December 1968 HES report placed 76.3 per cent of the population in the "relatively secure" category; NLF forces controlled 12.3 per cent with 11.4 per cent of the population "contested" by both sides. The State Department, however, noted that included as "relatively secure" were "C-rated" hamlets which were "subject to VC harassment and where the infrastructure has been identified and curtailed but is still opera-



tive." If a "relatively secure" classification were reserved for only A and B-rated hamlets, while the C-rated hamlets were judged as "constested," the figures would have shifted dramatically: Less than half of the population--46.7 per cent--would have been classified as "relatively secure", while 41 per cent would have become "contested." These figures did not differ greatly from those for 1965. "Indeed," noted the State Department, "some studies have found that, if the indicators of the level of VC military and political operations were considered in isolation from the remaining HES statistics, one could in fact conclude that very little progress has been made in the past two years."

OSD went even further by arguing that "the portion of the SVN rural population which was aligned with the VC and aligned with the GVN is approximately the same today as it was in 1962." The government controlled 5 million people in 1962 and still did in 1968. The VC controlled approximately 2.6 million in 1962 and approximately 2.2 million in 1968. Of the remaining 7 to 10 million South Vietnamese, 2 to 3 million abandoned the countryside for the cities, while "5 to 7 million have wandered back and forth from GVN influence to VC influence, dependent upon who was placing the greatest pressure upon them to conform at any given moment." OSD also found that much of what was reported by HES as net gains in "secure" population resulted not from newly-pacified hamlets, but rather from (a) population shifts of individuals anxious to leave the rural combat zone, and (b) accounting adjustments. Indeed, DOD reported that 67 per cent of the hamlets targetted for pacification in 1968 had already been RD or "new life" hamlets prior to that year; "this would seem to corroborate some observer's statements that we have been pacifying the same hamlets year after year."

OSD concluded further that "at the present, it appears that at least 50 per cent of the total rural population is subject to significant VC presence and influence." OSD also joined JCS, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV in admitting that "the population generally tends to support whichever side is in military control."



The civilian and military agencies' intelligence revealed a very strong and active insurgent organization. Although the Defense Department claimed 290,000 VC/NVA casualties in 1968, representing 92.1 per cent (!) of their average estimated strength, it was revealed that:

Since January 1967 the percentage of the South Vietnamese people subject to active influence by the VC/NLF has gone from 58 to 61 by the end of November 1968.

While the GVN had some 38,000 members of its political infrastructure at the village and hamlet level, the NLF had 70,000 or more. One half of the villages in South Vietnam had NLF "Liberation Committees," or shadow governments, by November 1968. The NLF assassinated an estimated 1,300 GVN officials during the year, while kidnapping another 330. Perhaps these less abstract statistics led the CIA to write:

When HES is used to measure the capabilities and activities of the VC in the countryside--as opposed to measuring population control--we find that in the twenty-one months after January 1967, we actually lost ground in our battle with the Communists.

In assessing the future potential for pacifying the countryside, DOD was divided. The most optimistic view, held by JCS, CINCPAC, and MACV, claimed "the VC/NVA are considerably weakened" and "pacification progress should accelerate in 1969." A second group, including OSD, held that, although progress was made in 1968, they could not determine whether this was due to VC/NVA weakness or was a result of a VC/NVA strategy to forego opposing GVN pacification in favor of concentrating on "organizing for the forthcoming political struggle." Pacification progress would probably be made in 1969, said this second group, but it seemed "unlikely" that 1969 goals would be met.

A third group within the Defense Department, described as "generally in the minority," believed that "pacification has not made 'real' progress during 1968" and that the absence of opposition was a result of VC/NVA strategy, not weakness:

This view would hold that the VC influence over the countryside has not diminished but has increased during 1968 and that "great" progress or "real" progress is unlikely in 1969 unless the VC influence and presence is overcome and a GVN presence and influence installed; and the program as presently conceived is unlikely to accomplish such a task.



Instead of emphasizing programmatic adjustments, this group declared that further progress "would require complete reorientation of the system of values and perceptions that the present Vietnamese leadership possesses."

The State Department's Intelligence and Research branch (INR) saw an equally gloomy future for pacification, stating that, due to "basic deficiencies" in the program, there was "little reason to expect a significant change in the situation in the countryside in the next two years."

These assessments amounted to an open admission that the National Liberation Front still had firm roots in the countryside of South Vietnam at the end of 1968. Despite the American-GVN military pressure of the previous eight years, the NLF had maintained a strong political presence that pacification campaigns were unable to dislodge. The United States and its client government had been able to extend a wider physical control over the people of South Vietnam, yet real progress in "winning hearts and minds" remained an elusive goal.